



# Indian Patchwork

*Other Books by Edward Charles*

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*Novels:*

THOSE THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE

*A Study in Madness*

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MEN'S GODS (*Limited Edition*)

*A Fragment from an Unfinished Pageant*

# Indian Patchwork

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*By* EDWARD & MARY CHARLES



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TO  
OUR DAUGHTER  
WHO WAS SPARED ALL THIS



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## A P O L O G Y, 1933

OF the patchwork which follows, the sections marked "A" are extracts from memoranda made by me at a time when I was Principal of a large, mixed, Hindu-Moslem University College in Central India.

I did not keep a regular diary, but made a habit of recording at once certain happenings, sometimes because I felt that a contemporary record might be useful to me in my subsequent work of College administration, sometimes because some isolated event seemed to have a deeper personal significance than the rest of the round.

The sections marked "B" are extracts, generally for corresponding dates, from the regular diary which my wife kept all the time we were in India. My wife has revised these entries, striking out what she felt to be private, and has given me permission to use what remains.

Before allowing this patchwork to be published, I have done all I can to conceal the identity of all those people, whether Indian or European, with whom we came into contact in India and about

whom this patchwork is necessarily written. I have used initials throughout, and these fictitious: I have tried, I hope and believe successfully, to conceal even the identity of places. Here and there, for greater discretion, I have altered the dates of events, but not their relationship.

My wife and I hope that the publication of this patchwork will not cause pain to anybody; and, even where we may seem the most assertive, we do not claim for any part of this book the value of considered judgment. The book is nothing but a true record of our emotions in a very unhappy country; and, as such, it deals with purely local events; but in India there are few men who can see beyond their own front doors.

EDWARD CHARLES.

*Anduze, Gard,  
France.*

PART ONE

“A”

*THE COBRA*





*29th October, 1927.*

I can't tolerate cobras in my commode!

Mary took the story well; but she probably ought not to have been told it at all. But I can't tolerate silence in India; and what else has there been to talk about; and with P—— and S——\* coming to tea it was inevitable that the thing should come out, so I told her as much of the story as was good for her, at lunch, to get in my account first.

But, anyway, the thing is worth recording here, in detail, I suppose. It will bring to-day back to me better than a record of P——'s sophistry or D——'s† genial suave indifference.

I arrived at College at nine o'clock, in a foul temper, and with the bundle of mail. On the way up through the compound I saw that the whole row of sweet-peas on the right has been pulled up by the roots and eaten off. It's a pity, for they were doing well. If it's the monkeys, and I suppose it is, then they've done it simply because they saw us all, gardeners, Mary and me, at work, watering, shading,

\*P—— and S—— were respectively Professor and Lecturer either in Physics or in Chemistry: I forget which.

†D—— was the Indian Vice-Principal of the College.

sticking the damn things. There is plenty of other tender green for the monkeys to eat. Besides, they stick round the house and never come up the drive to the College at all.

At ten o'clock I got rid of babu S—— G——\* and had a lecture at ten-five. I collected my papers on my desk and went into my lavatory, where it happened that, looking down, I saw, in the enamel tin, or thought I saw, something move. I think that I must have expected a scorpion, for all I can have seen must have been the flick of a tail. I lifted the seat with the tip of my toe, and kicked it back on its hinges.

There in the pan, curled round the side, right up under the shadow of the wooden ring of a seat, invisible from above with the seat lowered, unable to escape till the seat were lifted, was coiled a cobra . . . a good-sized cobra, fully three feet long.

The snake did not move at all. I think that I must have been fascinated, hypnotised, immobile, too, for several seconds. I do not think that I was frightened: it is hard to say, even at this remove. I do not remember fear, but I do remember a vast sense of horror settling like a cloud over me, so that

\* Babu S—— G—— was the Principal's head clerk.

I was giddy and as it were asphyxiated by the pervasion of horror. Death so near me, so seemingly inevitable, if not to-day, then to-morrow, if not here, then there, death everywhere in this rancid sunshine, death in this stinking soil; and I am sure that I knew, even as I saw the snake, that it had been put there for me.

I *knew* that its presence was no accident.

For a moment, for a perceptible, measurable space of time, I waited perfectly still for fate, the snake, accident, death, *enfin* for the other party, to make the next move.

And the snake was still as death; and then I saw it, or thought I saw it, breathing.

My senses came back with a rush and in a second I had slammed down both the seat and the upper lid of the commode with a crash, and slipped on my coat and stepped back into my office.

I rang my bell and the pert idiot of an under-clerk appeared: his silly, self-assured face irritated me; and I distinctly remember wondering whether or no he were looking at my lumbar quarters. Of course he wasn't . . . and yet, why not?

I stood behind my desk, clothed and in my right mind: on my desk were the trappings of office, my trays of letters and part of the College file, and, near

my hand, the books and notes for my lecture. The idea of teasing this high-caste Hindu suddenly flattered my outraged skin. He is the world's worst clerk, anyway. I let him stand a minute.

"You rang, sir?" he minced. I object to my clerks calling me "sir" in India: they can learn to say "sahib," like anyone else.

"Go and examine my lavatory," I said.

I don't think his English is as good as he would have me believe; and he stood still a long time before the meaning of what I had said got under his skin; then I saw him go pale under the dark brown.

He did not speak. I think that perhaps I had hurt him as much as I had been hurt: he began to tremble. I don't suppose that I am a very imposing figure, but I am tall; and a young Englishman behind his desk in the Principal's office of an Indian University College has, outwardly at any rate, everything on his side, clothes, skin, height, language, assurance, race.

It was horrible . . . disgusting. The boy began to tremble. I think he is a Brahmin, but I'm not sure. He is high caste, anyway. I must find out one day what his caste is.

The boy began to tremble: it was disgraceful, but I was furious: my temper was up. I believe that just

then I would have done anything, and the boy's trembling made me taste blood. I wanted to hurt, to hurt everyone, anyone, any Indian, any Hindu anyway.

“Did you hear what I said?” I yelled at the boy; and the flow began. . . . He was a Hindu. . . . He was this and that. . . . I was a most kind, gentle, noble, considerate Principal. . . . I was a great, wise man, come to bring enlightenment to poor, benighted India. . . . I was a friend of the poor, the humble. . . . I was a man of infinite charity.

“That's enough,” I said, “go and find the Vice-Principal.” And the boy fled.

I was suspicious. . . . I was leaving nothing to chance. . . . I wasn't having anyone, sweeper or professor of Urdu, monkeying with my lavatory before D—— came along.

I went back on to the terrace behind my office and stood there between the door of the lavatory and the open swing door of my room.

The boy came back into my office and failed to see me standing behind.

“Where's the Vice-Principal?” I called, as the boy was going out. He jumped, of course, and came back, and then saw me standing near the lavatory door. He must have thought me really

mad, but he controlled himself well this time.

“The Vice-Principal, sir, has a lecture on Milton to the 2nd Year B.A. class, sir.”

“Well, bring him along then.”

“What, sir?”

“Ask Mr. D—— to be kind enough to come and see the Principal instantly: do you understand?”

And the boy went; and S—— G—— came floundering back, his half ton of flesh rolling into my office, which I suppose he thought would be vacant, making the air rush out behind, like the kind of displacement you get when launching a boat.

I like S—— G—— nine times out of ten. This morning he was odious. I let him get into my office and up to my desk and begin nosing about in the “out” basket, where I don’t think that there was anything but some letters I had signed yesterday evening and sat on all night.

He was fatter to-day than ever before. His great neck was indescribably repulsive from where I stood; and his white baju\* was much too tight in the collar.

“S—— G——,” I said as quietly as I could. “Sit down in my chair and wait. . . . Mr. D—— is coming in a minute.”

\* Baju—coat. Generally a coat is affected with a high “military” collar buttoned up to the chin.

Old S—— G—— jumped and looked about for me between his overgrown eyelids, then he brushed his hand across his sweating face and blew, and lifting his head like a water-buffalo, he spotted me on the verandah behind.

“Oh, sir,” he said. “You have a lecture, this period, sir. . . . Will I take your books along for you? The students will be awaiting your coming with respectful impatience, sir.”

“Let them wait, it’s so good for their respect,” I said. “There are some things a man finds very foul, S—— G——, creeping murder of any kind is distasteful to a middle-class European.”

“Is that so, sir?” I don’t know whether S—— G—— is a fool or a knave, but he said something like this: “Is that so, sir? What book in English literature are the third year B.A. classes studying this term, sir? *Othello*? or *Antony and Cleopatra*, sir?”

“Neither, S—— G——,” I said. “Listen to me and don’t jump to conclusions: creeping, cringing, sneaking murder is horrible to me; but even in murder there are degrees of decency. A dagger in the back is foul, but poison in the buttocks is a purely Indian trick.”

Neither S—— G——’s vast bulk nor his ex-



tensive knowledge of English comprehended such things as buttocks.

“Poison in the —— ?” he asked, and scored a point, the only point I was to cede to anybody this morning. I decided that I could afford no more familiarity and for the life of me I couldn’t think of any other word for buttocks.

“Sit down and wait. I shall want you in a minute. Mr. D—— is just coming.”

No, I think that S—— G—— is more of a knave than a fool, for he did sit down without more ado, not, it is true, in my chair, but in a chair on the far side of my desk, and there he proceeded to busy himself with the “incoming mail” basket. The buffalo, wisest of beasts, had scented danger.

D—— came in, all bland and imperturbable, and S—— G—— jumped up.

D——, of course, smelled me out instantly, like a stag on Dartmoor. D—— is a damned clever fellow. . . . All the same I think that he had been put on his guard.

His “Good morning, Mr. Principal,” was suaver and brighter than ever. “Can I be of any help? Now, is there any little point which I can elucidate for you, Mr. Principal?”

If D—— is really just sitting tight and planning

to be Principal here himself, one day, I suppose it is a very clever stunt, his everlasting, “Mr. Principal,” whenever he speaks to me; but I like D——. I don’t believe a word Mary says. Mary doesn’t know D——. She’s met him half a dozen times, I should think; but, of course, she thinks she’s got intuition, whatever that may be.

And yet D—— was b——y, this morning.

“Each and every time Mr. Principal has anything to ask me, I think it a great honour to be able, if I can, to be of help.”

“Each and every time I find a cobra in my commode, Mr. D——, I shall have it killed in your presence. Did you see any professors in the senior common room as you came by?”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Principal. I daresay the professors and lecturers are all about their devoted duties, Mr. Principal, but if you wish to speak to anyone . . .”

Just at this moment, as luck would have it, the dear old buffer, M—— K——,\* went by, shuffling along behind his beard. I thought it might be a good thing to make a real show of this killing; and, after all, the Professor of Persian is a good person to have about, because he is, of course, a Moslem,

\*Professor M—— K—— was, I believe, more than seventy years old.

indeed, the leader of the Moslems in the city, who fixes the date of the Moslem festivals by the visibility of the stars on certain days, and is generally rather a grand person.

I holloa'd out to him without more ado; but he's a dear old man and doesn't seem to mind being holloa'd at; and he just blinked his beard once or twice and came trotting up the steps on to the back verandah of my office block.

The young clerk was hanging about in front of my office: I saw his feet pass under the door, so I called him in; and shook hands with M—— K—— and sent the young clerk to fetch two sweepers and a broom-handle.

Then we waited an interminable time, everybody knowing, except perhaps old M—— K——, that a young drama was being played; and then up ran my own two sweepers from the bungalow.

This *did* get my goat.

“Do you mean to say you ran all the way to my bungalow to fetch my sweepers? Who the hell do you think is in the habit of dealing with my lavatory at College?”

However, there they stood, poor boys, a couple of untouchables, standing at attention on the wide verandah. We were collecting an audience, anyway.

I particularly liked one of my sweepers, too.

D—— took the matter in hand and gave some quick orders in Hindi, and in forty-five seconds half a dozen College sweepers were grovelling about, salaaming on the steps. Then each had to be armed. You'd have thought a college in an estate of a hundred and sixty acres could provide six sticks fairly quickly, but no. At last they came drifting back, one by one, the sweepers, with bamboos of varying thicknesses, some so enormous, so long and so heavy on the old men's shoulders that it would have been like attacking an ant in a cleft rock with the butt of a gun.

Old M—— K—— was getting restive; and his beard kept catching the breeze. He hadn't the least idea what was expected of him, and kept stroking his beard back into place.

Then I had a final look at the phalanx of sweepers, and the arms, which they had in the end selected, and at the last moment I lost courage myself. There doesn't appear to be a college sweeper on the “menial staff register” under seventy; but I wasn't going to let my sweepers be used for the dirty work. I went into my office and collected my walking stick.

In India it may or may not be taboo for the

Principal to do menial work in the presence of his college sweepers; but there are certain risks I am not thinking of running.

I opened the door of my lavatory, and waved in the crowd.

Mr. D—— said: “This is a dramatic moment, Mr. Principal, what a pity it has happened in the lavatory.”

“It couldn’t have very well happened anywhere else,” I said. “No, no, M—— K——, don’t go away, please, I am anxious for you to see this thing.”

And so saying, with the end of my stick I lifted the two lids at once.

I stepped back and D——, of course, was delightfully near the door. Old M—— K—— hissed in his beard like the cobra itself, my sweepers, who were outside, had crowded to the door to see the fun. There was a general blockage, but Mr. D—— bore all before him.

“We will see no more, Mr. Principal. The walls will be all spattered with blood. . . . It will be like the murder of Julius Cæsar. We will let it be: it does not matter much.”

“It matters the hell of a lot,” I said, but I was glad to be outside and old M—— K—— was wiping

his forehead with his sleeve; and certainly the shrieks and the banging and slashing inside suggested murder.

In twenty seconds it was all over.

The sweepers came out grinning and the body was dragged out on a stick.

“But,” said Mr. D——, “I’ve never seen a cobra in such a place before.”

“You never will again,” I assured him. He’s a clever man, D——.

“The lid was open, Mr. Principal, I suppose.”

“Yes,” I said. “Of course the lid was open, but the seat was down.”

“Ah, yes,” he said, “in the hot weather they will go anywhere for shade.”

“Come, D——,” I said, “not up six brick steps, along a brick verandah, and up the metal legs of a commode.”

“That,” he breathed sententiously, “that, Mr. Principal, we shall never know.”

“But I know,” I snarled. I think I must have been getting angry again.

“If the Principal will allow me,” said M—— K——, “I will take my leave. I thank God you were saved to this College.”

“If you will allow me, Mr. Principal,” said Mr.

D——, "to offer humbly a suggestion, I would say that whatever the Principal knows will be right, of course, but knowledge for a Principal is not fit for vulgar ears. Sauce for the gander, Mr. Principal, is no good for the goose."

Well, there was nothing more I could do about it. By lunch time I had got over my feeling of horror and hatred, and told Mary (for she was bound to hear sooner or later) that I had found a cobra in my commode.

But I am glad to have this record: it can go into my private file. I may want it before I leave India. Shall I ever leave India? I sometimes think that that is the dominant fear of all white men here, not the fear of sudden death, not the fear of a ruined liver, but the fear that one day they may be buried in this soil, to be white flesh rotting in this red-brown earth.

My father had thirty years of it, and got out.

Will the luck hold for another generation? There shall not be a third, if I have anything to do with the fate of my children. No child of mine shall come out and monkey with this land.

We've been here a hundred and fifty years; and what has it all been worth? We've never even established the legality of our tenure to the Hindu

mind. Kindness has bred lies and cruelty has bred silence. Why can't we get out? Is there no morality greater than expediency? Poor India. . . . Poor, poor India. And we? We have meant so well.

*2 a.m., 30th October, 1927.*





PART ONE

“B”

*PURDAH*



29th October, 1927. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

Yesterday E. discovered that all his papers in one of the drawers of his desk had been nibbled and chewed, so we sent off the bearer to get hold of a rat-trap. It took him hours, but eventually we saw him coming back on his rickety old bicycle with a solid-looking wire trap.

This morning the first thing I asked him as he came in with our morning tea was whether there were anything in the trap. "No, mem-sahib," he answered, so quickly that I knew he had not looked. However, a minute or two after he had gone out, he reappeared with the trap in which was struggling a fine bold young rat. "One mouse present here," he announced solemnly: it made us laugh—I wonder why. Perhaps because our bearer is such a small man that he looked very like a mouse himself, his rather frightened little face peering out from under his top-heavy turban.

It is wonderful to have caught the rat so quickly: my only fear is that he may have left a wife and family behind in some snug corner.\* We sent the

\*It turned out happily that this rat had been a bachelor.

rat up by runner, for “Nobs,” to Colonel James’s bungalow.\*

I visited the kitchen garden as usual. I don’t seem to get any better at facing this heat: I always have to stop a moment and gather my forces together before I plunge into that quivering yellow veil, which is the sunlight of India. Breaking into it from the shade makes me feel as if I had been hit. Of course it’s not quite so hot now as it has been, but it doesn’t seem to make any difference in the mornings.

The radishes aren’t ready yet. The head gardener came up just as I was gingerly replacing the young innocent I had unearthed, but my conversation has still to be confined to waving my hands in all directions and saying “acha.” I wish I could talk to him: I am sure he would be interesting about flowers in this climate. He is a fine-looking old man.

Each time I come back from the kitchen garden that line of poinsettias, which seems to march alongside the bungalow, looks more wonderful than ever. The living quality of that scarlet makes me want to hold my breath: it is glorious. One would like to think of the poinsettia as the symbol flower of

\*The “Civil Surgeon” was training his dog.

India. Alas, it can never be that: it is too bold, too straight, too uncompromising. No, it is the puce bougainvillaea, twining and wreathing itself in its helpless fawning way, which I find exactly typical of India.

Bearer came running up and told me, very excitedly, some story of a snake at College and E. having sent down for the sweepers. I was very much worried, but decided that nothing dreadful could have happened or I should have heard. I almost went up to College myself to see what it was all about, but I felt it would be unsuitable to plunge into an excited mêlée of professors and college servants, and just then two cards arrived from College, one from E. on which he'd scribbled, "Have no time now to deal with Mr. Hebrun. Please keep him to lunch. I'll try not to be late." The other card bore the name *Elibu P. Hebrun*. It sounded very Biblical and I thought I scented a missionary, but anyway Mr. H. had to be entertained.

He was a very strange old man, white-bearded and vague, but full of energy. He plunged at once into an explanation of his reason for coming to India. I think I can quote his words pretty well: "What is the reason," he asked, "of all this com-

moonal unrest? Why, just this. These Hindoos and Moslems, they will not just stretch out their arms, from the shoulder, and take the hands of one another in real good fellowship. Why, as I always say at any little meeting I may get up to address—and it is my intention to hold such a little meeting at this College with your good husband’s permission\*—how can you get anything done, when every man is holding his hands like this (here he doubled up his fists in a threatening way) instead of like this? (here he tenderly clasped his left hand with his right). Yes,” he went on, “I’ve made this world trip seven times, as I feel I’ve a call just to tell folks this, and I can’t say but what they’re glad to know of my little notion. Some of them think it’s great. Mrs. Charles, ma’am, I contend that if we could only get these Moslems *and* Hindoos holding each other’s hands for, say, two minutes a day, we should get right down to the root of this commoonal unrest problem.”

I know very little of the East; but it seems pretty obvious to me that Orientals are not likely to choose this particular way of showing good fellowship, so, to change the subject, I asked him if he were not beginning to find these world trips rather tiring?

\*The “good husband’s” permission was refused.—E.C. (1933.)

"Why, no, ma'am," he said, "not yet. Of course, I don't say but what in a few years' time I might not think of slacking off a bit. I've already passed the allotted span of years for man; but it's great! Yes, seven times round the world, and here in this li'l pocket is my Baedeker, my Bradshaw, my atlas and my compass."

I wondered how one small pocket could hold so many things, but I understood when Mr. H. with a great flourish drew out a small Bible.

My attention wandered while he rambled on, and I thought of the hundreds of thousands of people who come to this hopeless country, full of hope and the assurance of being able to solve or help to solve some of her problems; and I wondered if this mad old man were really any less helpful than all those other well-meaning people.

When E. got back to lunch he was able to keep the old man from discussing his threatened meeting at the College by telling us this extraordinary story of a cobra in his private commode. E. has not brought up the subject again since: it worries me a good deal to think how it can have got there.

My last glimpse of Mr. H. was to see him from the verandah walking hurriedly in quite the wrong direction, head bent and his hands monotonously



clasping and unclasping.

This evening I went to see the bearer's wife. They are Moslems, so she keeps strict purdah. This is the first time I have ever actually been inside any of the servants' quarters. Everything was clean and neat. (There was really nothing there to get untidy.) But what dreariness! One room, opening on to a courtyard which is bare even of a weed. The room contained a bed and a few pots for cooking: that was all. She has a sweet, gentle face, quite young, not more than about twenty I should think, yet the bearer told me she has had four children, all of whom are dead but one, a boy. Yet the Moslem women marry much later than the Hindus: still, I suppose that fifteen would have been quite a normal age for her to marry.

She was busy practising making a mat with a bit of canvas through which she threaded and knotted bits of wool.\*

I knew that Moslem women lead very dull lives, but until I saw the bearer's wife I hadn't realised at all what it must be like, all day in that small bare room with only the little yard to walk in.

If she wants to go out into the city (which, as far as we know, has only been when she has had to

\*We had taught the bearer this, and had given him the materials.

go to hospital from time to time) she is put into a small, closed sort of litter, which her husband hires a man to trundle, while he walks beside, and which has but one wheel, and that in front, so that it looks like a wheelbarrow. True, in the evening we have seen her wandering about, closely veiled of course, in the servants' common compound.\*

I suppose the boy's runnings in and out make a chain of little events in her day; and then she has the sewing and cooking to do.

She seems very skilful with her fingers, judging by the way she knotted the wool through the canvas. She is very childlike in her diffidence, especially when she holds out her work for approval with a shy smile. The bearer looked on delighted, obviously very proud of her. I was glad to see that, for I had imagined that *all* Moslems looked on their women as lower domestic animals, but I feel he is just as fond of her as he is of his only son.

In spite of her drab, monotonous life she seems contented. I suppose she had never expected very much of life; and now, here she is, with an affectionate husband and enough rupees to supply their

\*Our servants' quarters were built on two sides of an enclosed square, a hundred yards across and two hundred distant from our bungalow, all within the College estate. The Moslem quarters faced the Hindu. Each house consisted of one room and a tiny yard surrounded by a ten-foot brick wall.

daily necessities, and, greatest of all blessings, the crown of her life, a healthy son. He is a good-looking child, not quite three, chubby, serious and very shy. He is usually with his mother, but sometimes we see him peeping at us from an angle of the bungalow, or from behind a bush.

To-day he trotted busily in and out of the room while I talked to his parents. Once or twice he came and gazed with round dark eyes, leaning against his mother. She has had to pay a heavy price for this one healthy child. Disease has snatched three children from her, two in early infancy, and the third, a little girl of five, only about two months ago.

The bearer had told us of her death, the tears streaming down his cheeks. I don't know why I was so affected to hear of this little unknown girl's death, but at the time I found it strangely moving.

Now that I have seen the home she would have lived in, the kind of life she would have grown up to, I can only feel glad that, before the little prisoner had had time to be conscious of the bars of her cage, death so compassionately released her.

PART TWO

“A”

*AN UNHAPPY DAY*



12th November, 1927.

The whole world seems mad to-day, mad and bad and gone sour.

Mary is in bed and perhaps asleep, but if she be asleep, she is dreaming; as if anyone could help dreaming in India. Why, the very rhythm of the punka chuffing in its muffled hinge is a dream; but I suppose that next year, when we get electricity laid on, the whirr of the electric fans will be a nightmare. Do punka-coolies really pull the punka in their sleep?

I killed a buck monkey to-day, attended a meeting of the Governing Body and took the chair at a meeting of the Managing Committee, to which I gather that I am henceforth to be a sort of secretary, which means that I shall have to write the minutes, as well as sign them.

People get very queer in India: my predecessor used to sign the minutes for each meeting in the minute book, *George S—, M.A., Cantab., B.Sc., London, Principal*. Well, well! Let it be: it does not matter much, as D— says.

Now I must try to record the events of the day

as they happened. Well, then, I had R——’s gun\*: Mary had made me go and borrow it yesterday. I hate firearms, even an ordinary sporting gun fills me with shame, a shame for our civilisation. I couldn’t exactly say that to R——, whose gun I was borrowing, but I had to explain what I wanted the thing for and, at the same time, explain why I hadn’t a gun of my own.

It was embarrassing because I like R—— and respect him in a way; and, though he affected to laugh at my squeamishness, my attitude towards a “fowling-piece” (what a good phrase that is) hurt him a good deal more than his teasing hurt me.

R—— warned me that certain monkeys were sacred; but I knew that already and I know that the herd which have been plaguing us are not of the sacred race.

Oh, they are pathetic creatures, and they have the devil in them too . . . But what’s the use? The deed had to be done.

This morning I sacked the khitmagar† and when I told Mary that *that* deed was done she seemed relieved, yet the thought of the monkey has tortured her no less than it has me all the day long. To the

\*R—— was at that time the “Collector” of C——.

†Khitmagar is the butler of an English household in India.

khitmagar I don't believe that she has given another thought. He is six foot tall and a fine figure of a butler. His dignity and his aloofness defy sympathy, and of course his superstitions defy understanding, and Mary may be right; but who can tell in this country what is and what is not pathetic, what is and what is not justice?

After all, I had very little right to sack him because he has syphilis (according to reliable statistics seventy per cent of the population of this peninsula, male and female, has or has had syphilis—Katharine Mayo puts it higher). That is his own affair and its own penalty, and I was more or less satisfied that in all the circumstances we ran no grave risk of infection.

I had no right to sack him because of his religious beliefs and superstitions; if I objected to those I ought never to have engaged him. Yet when I learned to-day, from an underhand source too, that he had torn up my chits, ensuring him free treatment at Government hospital, and was still seeing his own witch-doctor,\* I sacked him out of hand.

I gave him the chance of being treated and cured

\*The expression “witch-doctor” should not be read too literally; it was perhaps written in heat or in despair. It implies too great a dignitary. The man was being treated by a native chemist, who was applying cow-dung mixed with herbs to a secondary sore.—*Author's Note*, 1933.



and of staying in my service at thirty-five rupees a month, as well as his keep and his wife's keep. He refused my offer and I told him to go: perhaps I had no alternative; but surely his suffering will be worse, far worse than the grinding, sulking kind of agony of my monkey, already at an end under a guava tree behind the kitchen garden.

I dealt with the khitmagar at eight o'clock and by half-past, head erect, he had walked down the drive, followed by his wife, whose face I have never even seen, and a small son wheeling off his barrowful of pots and pans, back from this wide, walled estate, back to the stink of the native bazaar.

Bearer has waited on us quite well to-day. I shan't have another khitmagar if I can help it. I have already raised the bearer's wages. Yet the bearer is a poor little snipe, and a sneak too. Oh, the servants are a tragic lot.

After breakfast Mary sent me round to the back to pepper a monkey. There was a herd of about forty, impudently picking its way across the garden path and laughing at me. I have been too long without a gun. I waited till the herd should separate a bit; and sure enough an old buck monkey sat down and coughed at me. When he got up to go on he was ten yards behind his flock of wives and

children. He looked an awful old swine, too, paunchy and immoral somehow, perhaps because he was so like humanity—for how else can an animal be moral or immoral?

I had my gun in my hand; but he somehow couldn't believe it after all these months. When he turned away to join his family he sauntered as impudently as an Indian money-lender; and I let fly at him from about fifty yards, and he and his herd scampered off like hell into the nearest tree.

For a moment I thought I had missed him, but I knew really that I must have stung him up. I assumed that he would take his foul herd off as soon as I was out of sight. It never occurred to me that I could have wounded him badly.

I was some time in the house collecting my thoughts. The day had begun badly. I had a lot to do at College and wanted to make some notes for my meeting.

I suppose the monkeys didn't dare to move till I had gone; and when I left it may have been ten o'clock; by then, I suppose, the old monkey had got stiff.

This evening he was still alive and still in the same tree at half-past five or later, but I was able to kill him, for he had climbed down for his exe-

cution, and went on climbing down even when he saw my gun again.

It was not a pleasant business. When he was dead I saw his little black hands clench and relax for the last time. Perhaps he was not very human; but I believe he had a sense of sin, a deliberate desire to tease and nag; that was what made him so foul before and so pathetic afterwards: and what else has man invented but a sense of sin?

When I got to College I had to deal with the Hindu kitchens. The inspection of a Hindu cook-house is a very tricky business, and it behoves me to record exactly my procedure.

At a quarter to eleven I got hold of the Vice-Principal, whose caste I have never discovered but who is, I fancy, a lax Hindu, and together we walked across the grounds and into the courtyard of the kitchen. In each of the divisions upon either side the Hindu servants of the appropriate caste were squatting indolently, it being apparently too early to begin preparing the midday meal.

The central courtyard runs east and west, and it being before noon and I having entered the courtyard from the west, I was walking into the morning sun, and my shadow, short enough anyway, was tidily behind me, not straying about into the eating

compartments, where it would have sullied the soil and vitiated any food which might have been lying about.

It's all bunkum anyway. Does not Gandhi himself eat with Europeans? Not European food, of course, but *with* Europeans? The fantastic rigour of these “collegiate” taboos is simply a method of obstructing administration.

It is extremely difficult for me to inspect the place and satisfy myself that it is comparatively clean from the central courtyard.

I made the servants move the saucepans about and bring them forward for me to examine. I put up, in this way, two scorpions at the back of a quite high-caste partition (the second on the left from the west). I told D—— to order the mess secretary of that mess to reprimand their cook.

Just as I was leaving I turned back unexpectedly and walked quickly east and came into view of the last partition on the right in time to see the cook squatting down and relieving himself on to a piece of paper spread on the floor.

I did not wait for D——.

I stepped quickly in, past another cook who was eating. I didn't give a damn for my shadow. I'm Principal of this College and I'll go where I like

and have the place clean, if I empty it of every Hindu student.

When I got to the back of the cubicle the boy had risen and was standing shyly looking down. I took him gently by the hand and led him out up to the astonished D——, who came running up.

D—— told the boy to wait while I took D—— in to see the evidence, what the French call in their criminal trials, “*les pièces à conviction.*”

On the way back again I noticed the other boy still sitting huddled sulkily over his bowl of rice. My shadow had not touched him. But he was anxious, guarding his rice against the pollution of my next passage.

I asked D—— to make the boy stand up. I objected to the attitude he was adopting. I wanted, too, to see behind him.

“Ah, Mr. Principal . . . Ah, I’m sorry, that I cannot do . . . he is eating. When a Hindu eats he worships his food as a God.”

“It’s bad luck,” I said, “for him and for his bowl of God; but I must have this place empty and examine it thoroughly. Tell him that he can get up, throw his food away and cook more later, when I have gone; or that he can finish his meal now and leave the College grounds for ever.”

Mr. D—— smiled wanly. “Mr. Principal,” he said, “I cannot speak to him while he is eating . . . he is not of my caste.”

“The responsibility is yours then, Mr. D——. The boy must leave this College and is hereby dismissed. See to it, Mr. D——, that his mess secretary pay him his wages and that he quit the compound this morning. Tie a string across the partition. The group who eat here must eat elsewhere to-day. Their cubicle is ‘out of bounds.’ If any question of students’ money is involved in the loss of that food stacked behind there, the College must and shall refund any deficit. It will be a matter of only a very few rupees. I will draw the cheque myself on the ‘repairs and maintenance’ account. This place is out of bounds and both these boys are dismissed. Do you understand?

“The first boy is dismissed for reasons which need no explanation, the second boy’s dismissal is on your shoulders, Mr. D——.”

“Whatever the Principal wishes shall be done. If you have finished your inspection, Mr. Principal, we can leave by this gate.”

“Yes . . . I can see the gate, Mr. D——.”

“Such a thing has never occurred before, Mr. Principal. I deeply regret it.”

“Regret what?” I asked. “The boy’s filthy habits or . . . or . . . his dismissal?”

“Ah, Mr. Principal, how you delight to tease! You have a stern humour, Mr. Charles . . . Come, come . . . We will let it be: it does not matter much.”

“Very well,” I said, “it does not matter, much.”

I do not think that I have often been so near to tears as I was when I got back to my cool office with the punka drifting its sigh over my head. That punka, stirring the dirty air . . . What else do any of us do?

What right had I to keep the College clean, forsooth? This College is for Indians. Half its income is government money, half is from public subscription, endowment, fees, Indian money. But all of it Indian money. We have founded an institution for Indians, which Indians frequent and support. They want to learn English literature. *I* don’t know why . . . *They* don’t know why . . . Nobody knows why. They want to call themselves B.A., or, failing that, *B.A., Plucked*, which seems almost as good. (Where did they get the word “plucked”?) They want to become *vakhils*.\* Talk, talk, talk.

\*A *vakhil* is literally a “pleader,” i.e., an Indian lawyer. The familiar distinction between the solicitor and the barrister is less clearly defined in practice in the Indian Courts.

They don't want to learn the elements of hygiene, as we understand those elements. They don't want to learn about honesty, as we understand honesty, about cleanliness as we understand it. We talk in terms of germs: they talk in terms of the sacredness of life. We talk of drains: they talk of the cycle of decay.

Yet they have brought me eight thousand miles to run their college for them.

Rubbish! They have brought me out to conform with the terms of their charter . . . and one day, one day soon, that charter, every Indian charter, will be revised. In the meantime, who is master? I, who take their pay, or they?

We'll let it be: it does not matter much. They pay to have me for a master; and one day they will say, "Look, so-and-so we had, and so-and-so, and look, each and every one is gone."

I took D—— down to lunch. He didn't like the invitation, but I wanted him for last year's accounts before the meeting of the Managing Committee; and I wanted to make him see that business is business and doesn't affect my personal relation with him.

We talked "shop" at lunch and M. told me that



the monkey I had peppered was still in the tree, but out of range.

The committee meeting was at three. It is a strange proposition that R—— T—— and R—— should be on the committee and on the board too.

The committee is my own little affair, where I take the chair unless the collector come up from Cantonments,\* when I give way to him. It consists of two Englishmen, the Collector and myself, two graduates of this College, the Vice-Principal and one professor elected by the students, and one professor nominated by the Principal.

We pass accounts: the auditors need our signature: we prepare the budget for internal expenses: we sit as a library committee, and we appoint and remove lecturers and appoint professors, whose removal, however, requires the ratification of the senate. (Sitting, I suppose, five hundred miles away at P——. How jolly!)

I fought my committee hard for half an hour over a vote of a hundred rupees a month for disinfectants for use in the College buildings, and for two extra sweepers. I carried the motion, of course,

\*Cantonments is the European residential area outside a native city, so named because theoretically and sometimes in practice troops are there quartered.

R—— and R—— T—— dissenting. We turned ourselves into a library committee and bought the *Oxford English Dictionary* for nearly a hundred pounds. I moved an amendment substituting the *Encyclopædia Britannica* at about a third of the price of the *O.E.D.* The amendment was defeated. The original motion was carried with one dissenting vote, my own.

So we shall have the finest English dictionary in the world. What cross-word champions we shall be! Only one thousand five hundred rupees, the sum I need to disinfect the lecture halls twice weekly for fifteen months. But, of course, we can have both, and no doubt I can disinfect the library and the *O.E.D.* as well!

When the meeting had adjourned R—— and R—— T—— hung about and I asked them to come and sit in my office; but they refused. They, of course, can sit where they want to. . . . The library is theirs: they have only to hang a notice on the door, “Meeting of Governing Body in Progress,” and even I am instantly excluded, unless invited to attend.

I went back to my office to ask the Librarian to order the *O.E.D.* and the clerk to order some lysol and some scrubbing brushes.

Then the motor-cars began. They came purring past my office block toward the library block, vast limousines in yellow and white . . . Rolls, Daimler, Vauxhall had made these beautiful motor-cars . . . Coachbuilders with royal warrants had upholstered them and guaranteed them free from cow-hide; and when they are not moving majestically over the pink roads of India, they are garaged for the most part in hovels in the native bazaars.

Everybody was attending the meeting of the Governing Body of C—— College to see the new Principal, the very thin tall man with a little beard and quick, angry movements, the man who had taken a first in law at Oxford and who had not become a vakhil, the man who thought that hygiene was practical politics in India, the man who allotted the bursaries in the Principal's gift to bachelor students, thereby putting a premium on immorality.

No wonder the cars came gliding in, to park in the shade of the cupola'd library, whose pink domes and minarets were all dashed with white streaks, where the vultures had held their ugly congeries.

And, with the evening, the vultures were coming back too, swooping down low and circling above the cars and then climbing clumsily back into the air, their bare red necks straining, the great claws

dropped to catch the decorated parapet of the library roof.

Out of the white and yellow motor cars the potentates emerged, princes and merchant princes, vakhils, vakhils, vakhils, politicians, members of Congress, members of the Provincial Legislative Assembly, members of the Indian Legislative Assembly, the Rajah of the adjoining native state, whose father had subscribed half the money to build this College and had entertained my father forty years ago, when shooting and princes were in fashion, before fat stomachs and politics and the Bar had become the rage. Autocracy, plutocracy, democracy . . . *κράτος*, indeed, progress? Who knows?

Presently a card was brought me, inviting me to present myself before the Governing Body. (I have been here just five months to-day.) I gathered up my papers and walked along the cloisters into the back door of the library, by which entrance, apparently, I was not expected.

However, I was easily recognisable, though very few of these men had seen me before. The Moslems had mostly come in horse-drawn barouches and were gathered very much at one end of the table. Some of these had already called upon me, either

at my office or my bungalow. These rose and bowed to me. The Hindus were all unknown to me, except, of course, R—— and R—— T——, who had had themselves co-opted on to the Managing Committee in the capacity of graduates of the College, and whom I have had to meet each fortnight.

The only other European in the room was the Acting Commissioner, on whom I had, of course, left a card, but with whom acquaintance had got no further.

So, forsooth, I was left to make my own advances.

How they hated me! I said, for someone had to speak and there were sixty Indians and two Europeans in the stuffy library, “Good evening. It is I to whom you wish to speak. I am the Principal. May I sit down?”

Sixty-one people assented to this modest request; and to my horror I found that a chair was placed for me between R—— and R—— T——.

I pulled my chair well back from the table so that I could see the Acting Commissioner, at the head of the table, from behind the great black neck of R——. R——’s enormous bulk prevented him too from being very near the table; and his impotent little hands did not seem to reach beyond his great belly. Half a journalist, half a money-lender, wholly

a vakhil, he is a politician, an agitator and a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly, the reputed owner of two newspapers and the undoubted owner of a Rolls-Royce motor-car constructed to encompass his supreme girth.\*

He got up at once, flapping helplessly with his undersized hands like a vast prehistoric bird trying to balance itself with atrophied wings.

“Mr. Chairman,” he said, “it is my great honour to introduce to this illustrious assembly our new and distinguished Principal. I have myself had the pleasure of meeting our Principal at several sessions of the Managing Committee. I cannot say that we have always seen eye to eye. I have had to oppose him on a distressing number of occasions, but I must be honest with you, gentlemen, and confess that on each and every one of these points I have, with my colleagues, deferred to our Principal; and perhaps I shall come to realise that he has been right.

“I only mention this, because in introducing our new Principal, I want to lay stress on the fact that he is a man of experience, of decision, of will.

“This is, thank God, a democratic age. Education

\*This gentleman had just emerged from prison and had not been confined there for any mere political offence. He has since been the guest of the nation at the Round Table Conference.

is the fair province of democracy. I will not, I refuse absolutely to believe, I dismiss, I abhor the suggestion that our new Principal is an autocrat.

“Gentlemen, our new Principal, Mr. Edward Charles. Long may he be among us!

“I move that the Principal be now asked to read the six-monthly report.”

Everybody clapped this sally, except the Acting Commissioner, who glowered about; and, one by one, the Moslems, seeing that they were doing the wrong thing, stopped clapping; but the Hindus clapped on, an odour of black sweat rising from their agitated hands, and the heavy smell of too many lunches coming with their thick breath into the close, darkened room.

“Order, please,” said the Acting Commissioner. “Now, Mr. Charles, will you be kind enough to read any report you may have prepared, and address us upon any matter which you consider this body should deal with?”

“I say in advance and without hesitation that you will have my wholehearted support in any matter of administration, where, feeling your hands too tied, you look for more authority.

“We all know well enough that committees don’t get things done. We meet here twice a year to hear

what you have been able to do and to help you by giving you a free hand to do as much and more in the coming six months.

“Now, Mr. Charles . . . Right ahead, please.”

Over the fair green baize province of democracy I read my report, one-and-a-half typescript pages, clipped together at the top left-hand corner with my own punch. I threw the innocent pages down on the table of educated democracy and turned to the chair again to ask for help with the squatter.

Something white caught my eye and I looked down.

R—— T——, on my left, had seized page one of my report. A fat, bald man whose name I do not know, sitting opposite to R—— T——, was leaning across the table pulling at page two, which was flapping loose from the top corner below R—— T——’s hands. The paper round the eyelet gave way and my report was in two pieces. The fat man sat down delighted to have secured page two. R—— T—— went on reading page one quite unconcerned. Such, I suppose, is the inevitable hunger of democracy.

Presently my page one started to go from hand to hand, down the table to the left, with the sun, like a decanter of port, and page two moved



contrariwise down the opposite side.

I sat down and waited for an answer to my appeal; but most of the board were craning over the table, looking down to where the pages of my report were drifting slowly together again, destined to meet at the foot of the table where Sir B—— K——, a small Moslem, was sitting immobile behind a huge beard. The rest of the board was whispering and murmuring.

“We will adopt the Principal’s report,” said the Acting Commissioner. “May I have it, please?”

Someone, desperately anxious to say the right thing, to show general familiarity with the procedure of board meetings, said: “We will take the Principal’s report as read.”

“I wonder why,” I asked. “I have in fact just read it.” Nobody seemed to understand: several faces looked at me blankly.

The papers of the report came together again, were taken up to the Acting Commissioner’s chair and signed. Nobody said anything about the squatter.

I got up again. R—— T——, on my left, got up too and bowed to the chair and went heavily out of the room on the tips of his toes, his centre of gravity swaying about, seeming to bend his toes in

his soft shoes right over, so that he looked as if he might fall forward on to his face.

“May I, then,” I said, “seek independent legal advice? Or may I proceed to an ejection myself?”

R—— got up and blew himself out; and I gathered he was going to speak for some time. Several Moslems got up and bowed and left the room. R—— waited for silence and then began the most astonishing speech.

I gathered the woman squatter is regarded by some as a saint, because the “British Government,” whatever that may mean in India, has certified her brother as a dangerous lunatic and confined him in the asylum across the road; and she, in beatific fidelity, has come to C—— and squatted on a piece of College property opposite the asylum gates.

I do not understand whether her sanctity comes from her kinship to a certified lunatic, a homicide, by the way (though I know that lunacy is considered divine, rather than saintly, among certain primitive peoples), or from her fidelity to a lost cause.

I gathered that her brother had been the victim of “autocracy,” but that didn’t seem very relevant.

I gathered that the lady has lived for fifteen years entirely on charity and has built her mud hut entirely herself, first making the wall round her

piece of land. I gathered that for the wall she used a great deal of cow-dung, which somehow has given either her or the wall immense strength.

I gathered that she tells fortunes to almsgivers. I gathered that the tree in her enclosure was planted by the lady herself and has grown to its present enormous height with miraculous rapidity.

I gathered that the fruit of this tree is sterile, but that perhaps it will become fertile when an Indian Principal is appointed to the College, or, failing that, when the English have left India.

I did not gather what was to happen to the Moslem students upon my resignation in favour of a Hindu Principal, nominated by the saintly squatter, who is already in fair way to acquiring absolute and autocratic powers over ten square yards of College property by the mere lapse of time.

“Very well, Mr. R——,” said the Acting Commissioner, “I don’t think we need hear any more of the history of this case. I am surprised that she should have been allowed to stay so long; but we understand now that her removal must be done in such a way as to give the least possible offence to the less intelligent of the Hindu community in the city.

“I suppose we may now authorise the Principal

to apply for police aid in removing this woman.”

“Certainly,” said R——. “That is just what I was humbly about to submit to this illustrious board myself; but our Principal should be restrained in this matter and not plunge in himself, where angels fear to tread.”

“All right, Mr. R——, you may rest quite assured about that. You didn’t expect the Principal to go down and attack the woman, did you? And throw her out by the unaided force of his strong right hand?”

I looked down at my right hand, on the third finger of which I am wearing my mother’s “*intaglio*” ring of seventeenth-century Italian workmanship, engraved with the head of Brutus and two daggers above the words, reading backwards like the familiar *bath mat*, Eid Mar.

We are in November. E’er the ides of March be come again, whom shall I have murdered?

I got up and said, “That is just my trouble. I have consulted the Collector and the Commissioner of Police, who tell me that the police, being almost entirely Moslems, ought not to be asked to interfere in this purely Hindu matter, except upon the express authority of leaders of Hindu thought upon this board.”

“Oh!” said the chair. “You want a signed mandate from the Hindus. I can’t get you that. If you can’t act alone, you must leave the matter over till the next meeting of this board. The Commissioner will be back from leave by then. I know nothing about this woman. As you know, I’m only acting here. If you make difficulties for yourself, you’ll never get things done in India, Mr. Charles. Is there any other item on the agenda? Have you anything else to bring up?”

“The budget,” I said. “I have made a good many alterations in the allocations of the Acting Principal, who prepared a provisional budget last March.”

“Oh, the budget,” said the Acting Commissioner. “We don’t know anything about figures here. If you’ve got your new budget written out and will pass it along, I’ll sign it. It’s no use reading aloud a long list of figures. We should all go to sleep. I assume the board is unanimous in accepting the new Principal’s revised budget.”

Several people got up, I presume to protest, but the Acting Commissioner went on:

“Thank you, gentlemen. That’s quite all right. Let me have the budget sheet, Charles. I’ll sign it now. I think that closes the meeting. In conclusion I offer you on behalf of this board our unanimous

welcome to India and to this College. I hope you will like the work and that you and . . . and Mrs. Charles will settle down happily. The budget is accepted and duly signed. The meeting is adjourned. Good evening, gentlemen.”

We all got up, and one by one or in groups the august personages drifted through the several opened doors. I sat down again among my papers.

S—— G—— came in, breathing in heavily and respectfully the stale breath of so much greatness. I handed him the signed budget sheet and my report.

“Put the budget in the safe, S—— G——,” I said, “and send a copy of my report to our printers this evening and another copy of it to R——’s newspaper. I understand that they always print the thing as soon as it has been passed. Put the original in the file under Ga/P/1.”

“Mr. Principal, sair,” said S—— G——, “allow me to inform you that a deputation awaits the honour of your coming in the precincts of your private office. They are most respectful and eager in their humble desire to confer with you at your good pleasure.”

I got up: after all, it couldn’t matter to me of whom the deputation consisted, nor what it wanted.

I couldn't get back here to the bungalow unobserved.

S—— G—— bowed me out of the library and must seemingly have picked up my topee, which, it being by this time after five, I no longer needed.

S—— G—— carried my topee to the door and there handed it to my runner, who had been squatting at the door against any message I might have wanted to send out from the board room.

So we dropped into line, the lean Principal bare-headed, the gigantic clerk with small round black velvet cap, the half-naked runner with gleaming brown skin over his fine torso, and his smiling face showing lovely white teeth.

Of the three of us, it seems to me that he alone was worthy of any note, for he was, at least, a lovely animal.

Along the pink sandstone cloisters we went, the little procession. From the drive beyond, people turned from their yellow and white cars to watch us pass. I stepped out on to the lawn in front of my office between the glorious beds of zinnias, each taking a deeper colour in the evening light from the ochre and red of the dusty rays.

I picked a big cinnamon zinnia and idiotically put it in my buttonhole, where it must have looked

ridiculous and gaudy against the dead white; for Mary laughed at it when I got home.

I thought again that the zinnia has no scent, poor Indian flower, all splash and no reality.

Twenty or thirty students, in white coats and bright-coloured skirts looped through the crutch, made way for us; and one or two voices said, “Good evening, sair.”

I was thinking of my failure with the squatting woman, my failure with the khitmagar, my failure with the Hindu kitchens. Suddenly I thought of the monkey and felt sure that I had wounded him and that he was dying in great pain, and I had a vision of his sulky eyes looking down at me from a tree. What do any of us do? We wound; we neither kill nor cure.

I had set my heart on getting out that squatting woman. It is bitter. I feel the Commissioner has let me down. What does it matter?

In my office it was almost dark, but at my entrance the punka began wearily to flap. Wings of tired thought beating over and over again above the same ground.

The deputation was concerned to know whether the permanganate of potash supplied by me in dilute solution to rinse the Hindu drinking cups



along the cloisters might contain any animal fat.

I was able to reassure them, and they went away. After all, they knew quite well before they came. S—— G—— knew. There were third-year science students among them.

Why had they come? They did not know themselves, poor, malicious, spiteful, frightened, snarling, cringing lads, with pretty girlish faces. Instinct brought them out in the evening perhaps to tease a tired man. How can I tell?

I had a “bright” idea. I wrote a chit and sent the College runner to the club to fetch a bottle of champagne for dinner. Then, fortified in advance by the prospect of bright France bubbling on my dark “shishamwood” table, I went off to have a look at the squatter.

She came out of her self-constructed hovel as I got up to her cow-dung walls. She was quite nude, and was very dark-skinned and wrinkled all over her body; her great breasts hung down like two withered egg-plants. She turned her back on me and bending slightly forward, but hardly bending her knees at all, she began to defecate not merely before me, but, as it were, at me. Then I saw over her shoulder a figure in fawn ducks climb back into a yellow Daimler car and drive slowly away.

A member of the Governing Body, no doubt, had come to give alms and justify his conscience. Ding, dong, ding, dong, how their consciences ring and swing.

The old witch looked down the road and her peristalsis and her hatred both achieved, turned back into her hut, gathering sanctity under persecution, and alms from her persecutors; she was shut in for the night.

One of the lunatics across the road sent out a yell into the evening air; and I went home.

But at home there was the monkey, sure enough; and I got my gun and finished him off.

The bearer brought me a brandy-and-soda on the verandah before dinner, under the new punka we have had hung, and I raised his wages.

So do we buy for a little sum the semblance of peace that is just not enough.

It is so late now that it doesn't seem worth while going to bed. I shall have a bath and change this dinner-jacket and go for a walk before breakfast. I want to see the dawn.

4.30 a.m., 13th November, 1927.



PART TWO

“B”

*DEATH OF A MONKEY*



12th November, 1927. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

Yesterday evening, after a good deal of discussion and persuasion, E. went off and borrowed a gun from Mr. R——\* in order to shoot a monkey.

They have been very tiresome lately and we are beginning to fear for our vegetable garden.

There is generally some gardener about, so up till now it has escaped, but after all our trouble with it we cannot afford to take any more risks.

After all, it's not a fortnight since all our precious sweet-pea seedlings up the drive to College were snatched up in the twinkling of an eye.

This morning, just as E. was leaving for College, I spied the herd, slowly walking round from the front of the bungalow to the back. I told E. and he loaded and went to the back verandah. In a few seconds I heard the sound of a shot and E. saying: "Missed him, by Jove!" When I went round to the back I saw him looking up a large tree, which seemed to be full of monkeys. "Afraid I missed him," he said. "He was only about forty-five yards

\*R——, I.C.S., was the Collector of C——

away. I can't think how I *can* have missed him, but he didn't so much as give a jump, so I think I must have. As soon as I had fired they all flew up that tree. Well, I can't blaze into the middle of that lot; and I'm very late. I must get off to College.”

It took me most of the morning arranging the flowers the gardener brought in. The roses are just coming on, and they look charming in our flat “Satsuma” bowls, and the zinnias always delight me: zinnias (and tulips) are the most purely decorative of all flowers and their colours seem just exactly right for India, orange, crimson, pink and cinnamon. I put some poinsettias in a vase of boiling water; so far they are bearing up well. I do hope that they'll be a success, as they'll look lovely against our cream-washed walls.

E. brought Mr. D—— to lunch, as they both had to attend a Governing Board meeting at College this afternoon. I can't help liking Mr. D——, chiefly because he has such a lively sense of humour, and it is gratifying to see his vast bulk heaving silently after some little pleasantry, but also because he reminds me very much of one of my childhood's favourite characters in fiction, Mrs. Tiggywinkle, of the Peter Rabbit Series, whose eyes “went

twinkle-twinkle,” and whose nose “went snuffle-snuffle.”

Mr. D——’s eyes certainly twinkle; and if one can’t exactly see his nose go snuffle, one feels that he *is* rapidly snuffling up impressions through it, just as certain insects receive messages through their antennæ. I have met him several times before, but this is the first time he has had a meal with us.

Whenever he was offered food or drink he replied, with a deprecating wave of his hand, “Let it be. It does not matter much.” At first I was rather discouraged by this lofty, philosophical attitude towards the trivial daily needs, but I soon discovered that it was merely ultra-politeness. Mr. D—— did not want us to bother ourselves unduly about him.

There is very little that escapes those sharp, beady eyes. He has watched many English Principals come and go at C—— College, and he will watch many more, but in the end it will be Mr. D—— who will be Principal.

I can’t make out his attitude towards us. If he is a true philosopher, which I rather doubt, then he is friendly; but if he be a self-seeker, then of course he is just biding his time until he is Principal, and to gain that end he won’t be above plotting and



scheming to get rid of E. I wonder which he is?

After lunch we all went out to see if the monkeys were still anywhere in the garden, for the whole place seemed so quiet we thought they must have gone.

To our surprise there was one still in the tree. E. decided after a good look at him that he was the old male monkey at which he had fired this morning and that he must have hit him; so he fetched his gun to finish him off. Unfortunately he was out of range. He was right at the top of a very tall tree and E. only had an ordinary light sporting gun.

Anyway, after three shots he showed no signs of having been touched, and just after the third shot the College head clerk arrived with some papers for E. to sign; and after that he (E.) and Mr. D—— had to go off to this board meeting.

I did not sleep much this afternoon. It is not pleasant to know there is an animal wounded and in pain just outside in the garden; wounded by design, too, our design. I found it touching that he should have sent all his friends and relations away and was sitting there alone, stoically awaiting his end.

I don't believe he had altogether given up hope, for I saw him painfully climbing down a branch or

two. I believe he had decided to creep slowly down, branch by branch, and then when night fell like a black blanket, he would be able to struggle off under its cover to friends and shelter.

E. didn't come in till about half-past five this afternoon. I told him the monkey had come down a good deal lower, so he went out at once with his gun and I went with him. We could see him plainly then. He was sitting there, holding on with both paws, he, who until now had only used them for actually climbing, eating and flea-hunting. When he saw us with the gun, he looked down with a curiously resigned expression. In it one saw that terrible sense of fatalism which is the curse and the subtle consolation of the East.

Those hours in the tree had changed him. He was no longer the savage, cunning, greedy old patriarch of the monkey tribe. He was all the monkeys who are penned in small barred cages . . . he was all the natives of India who are penned in their small barred cages of ignorance and misery . . . he was India.

At the sound of the shot and the crackling and thud of his body, the servants came running. The Moslems were delighted at his death. The “bhisti”\*

\*Bhisti is the water-carrier, an honourable profession adopted by fairly high caste Hindus.

was not so pleased, I suppose because he felt that now his daily pleasure of hurling stones at the monkeys would cease.

We told the sweeper to take the body away and bury it; but this he said he could not do until the sun had set.\*

So, in the end, it was as the monkey had planned, and he found shelter when night was come.

\*Even the “Untouchables,” or “Depressed Classes” as they are called in India are governed by certain religious taboos.

PART THREE

“A”

*SCHOLARSHIPS*



15<sup>th</sup> November, 1927.

If the sums of money to be disbursed were more significant some guiding formula for their distribution would probably have been devised.

No one of these bursaries is worth more than £15 sterling a year. I don't know how many there may be. The money comes in in various odd ways into a number of separate little accounts. Perhaps with my new "Roneo Subject-Index file" I shall ultimately get a record of all these transactions into a single, discoverable department.

For some weeks S—— G—— has been bothering me to make the half-yearly allocation of the fifteen winter scholarships.\* At his request I set aside to-day: the next thing I knew was that I was asked to sign a voucher for six rupees for a payment to the local vernacular newspaper for a "classified advertisement" announcing my intention.

I suppose that I began to be alarmed then; but that was three weeks ago. Other things have put this out of my mind. I have allotted one or two

\*These scholarships, as far as I can remember, were tenable, once allotted, for three years with no precedent for interruption. Fifteen allotted in summer: fifteen in winter.

single scholarships and managed easily enough.

Last night, after I had seen Mary off to Agra, for three days, and had time to think, I began to panic.

When I got to my office this morning there was a crowd of about sixty youths strutting all over the lawn and prancing about in the most fantastic way, some of them reading aloud, others apparently declaiming poetry and walking with eyes shut into my zinnia beds.

Nobody took the slightest notice of me. I suppose I wasn't "*in cathedra*."

I've come to the conclusion that life in India is a game which consists of jumping into and out of official positions without anybody seeing you move. If you're spotted jumping, you're fined; and when you're "*in officio*" your pronouncements "*ex cathedra*" are all beautifully regulated by precedent and are expected to contradict whatever you may have said as a private person.

"I think zinnias are stupid, vulgar flowers," you say to your clerk, who is walking up the hill with you.

"Yes, sair, they have no perfume. In England does not the flora exhale everywhere, sair, a delicious fragrance, for so I am humbly but credibly informed,

Mr. Principal. Every street in England is scented with luxurious wallflowers, I believe, so that the odour is most agreeable to refined nostrils.”

Then, before you have time to dismiss from the mind this scent-pattern of English urban life, you arrive at the office.

“Mr. Principal, sair . . . the garden accounts being checked and found in good and fine order, require the honour of your signature. The gardener has also inscribed an order to Cawnpore for thirty-two packets of best mixed zinnia seed. Most noteworthy and grandiloquent will be the approach to the office block by yuletide, sir.”

As a matter of fact the zinnias do chatter away coarsely in their dry beds, like starlings in stubble. “Grandiloquent” is not such a bad word after all; and “yuletide,” why, S—— G—— might have done much worse! I am waiting for the day when he calls it “The festival of the nativity of the first-born male child of the most laudable virgin.”

However, to my muttons. To-day was scholarship day. Never shall I forget it; but I must write it all down, I suppose. I wonder whether my successor would enjoy my diary.

I had planned to have S—— G—— in my room to-day as a sort of assessor, and to take a shorthand



note of the proceedings; but no such luck. Old S—— G—— must have got wind of my idea. He gets all his impressions through the nose, whose flanges move up and down like an elephant's ears. He was not going to be mixed up with the responsibility of discriminating between one Indian and another.

As soon as I appeared the old buffalo waded in with a “leave-chit” made out in his own name for my signature. Against the printed words, REASON FOR REQUESTING LEAVE OF ABSENCE, he put, inscribed in small neat capitals, *Regrettable inevitable illness*, and then in a discreet bracket (*Intestinal Worms*).

Both had, rightly, I deemed, been given capital letters. I glanced at S—— G—— and suddenly I thought that he was going to explain. My courage failed me and, looking quickly down again, I signed the “chit.”

“Slip it in the ‘Leave-Box,’ as you go out,” I said.

“It is most just, generous and kind of you,” he said, “to grant me leave, for I am very much harassed, Mr. Principal, sir, with my poor belly.”

“Yes,” I said. “You must go straight home.”

“I go straight to the doctor, who will assuredly give me a balm to soothe, for yesterday, most

undeservingly, he gave me a cruel purge; and this I say, sair, in no lightness of heart. To-day I shall then repose because of your noble kindness, Mr. Principal.”

The second clerk appeared, obviously primed for the occasion. “I will call in the applicants for scholarship grant, sir, to your good order. I will call them in, Hindu and Moslem, indescribably.”

“Yes,” I said, for delay would now avail nothing. “Yes, call them in indiscriminately. I’m going to do the discrimination, so help me God.”

The first applicant minced into the room, with a large bag in his hand, stumbling in the mosquito curtain and making several sudden bows on his way up to my desk, each so unexpected as to give his walk the appearance of the strut of a water-wagtail.

He came right up to my desk and appeared to rub himself against the front of it, now become like a cow worried by flies.

“Name?” I asked. “You may sit down.”

“Thank you, sir,” he began, “to receive me in your august office. Your generosity is widespread as the net of the master, to catch fishes great and small. Great is my deserving, therefore shall I surely enter in.”

“You read the Bible, I see,” I said.

“Sair, I read the literature of many people. Persian, Urdu, Arabic, it is all as one. Shakespeare, Milton, Sterne and Lafcadio Hearn. I read also Macaulay; and the breadth of writing is like a great tree sprung from the root of British munificence. My father is a common workman, tilling the field, paying taxes. His eyes are not opened and behold he is as a blind beggar; but I am come to this great College in humble studentship to be a great speaker. Poetry and all wisdom I will learn and be a B.A., in three years or more. My father, too, sends his greetings to you and this bag of maize, if you will but take me up into your net. . . . I have much maize, for my father tills wide fields and this here is but a little.”

“Don’t talk so much. You’re a Hindu, I take it. Tell me your name and caste.”

I saw a puzzled look cross the youth’s eyes, and then the cloud lifted and he smiled a quite simple, naïve smile, showing good white teeth.

My interjection had not been part of the programme, had not been bargained for in the rehearsals, but it was of no importance. I had, after all, only asked a simple question, an easy leading question.

“I am a Hindu, sair,” he said. “I do not wear my caste marks for this great seat of learning does away with all. S—— P—— G—— is my name. I am a hard worker, but money I have not, for my father is an uninstructed man. It is hard . . . I have a wife and three children and at night I work for my school-leaving exam. My child is sick; she is a girl and very puny. I have no money, how shall I pay to be a B.A.?”

“I haven’t any idea,” I said. “How old are you?”

“I am nineteen years, sair, and here is my leaving certificate.”

“How old is your wife?”

“My wife is nothing at all, but she will have a baby in two months or more: he will be a son, I daresay, so she must have food.”

“How old is she?”

“She is seventeen years, sair. She is not beautiful.”

“Thank you, S—— P—— G——,” I said, looking at my note, and hoping that I had got the name right. “That will do.”

“Yes, sair. . . . You will give me the scholarship, sair. I will thank you all my life long, and pray that much riches and blessing come upon you and many, many children, for I am a very poor man.”

“A”

INDIAN

“Don’t be stupid. I said that would do. You may go now.”

“But, sair, will I not have the scholarship at C—— College, and win the B.A., by fine reading and speaking? We are eight . . . ten . . . in my family. I have many sisters. Very few are married. And my father is poor, unbenighted man.”

“How old is your eldest sister?”

A sudden gleam lit the boy’s face, as if he had understood something at last.

“She is married, sair, but to poor man and no scholar. She is eighteen, sair. Many sisters I have, not married, sir. Many different ages. Six, seven, nine, twelve, fifteen, sir. My father and I, we sorrow with disgrace they are not married, sir; but I put that all right by B.A., sair.”

“I really can’t understand what you’re saying,” I said. “I want to know at what ages your sisters have married.”

“At every age, sair.”

“Yes, that’s what I supposed, and no doubt your daughters will marry at ‘every age,’ too.”

“Oh, if I have the B.A. they will marry quick.”

“Yes,” I said. “Now you may go away.”

“But, sair, I cannot work like the others. I am scholar, I am student. How can I earn my money?”

I am high-school boy. I cannot work like common man. I have read literature and poetry: I cannot work like uncultured boy from low country village. How can I have food and give to my wife, if you do not give to me the scholarship? When I am B.A., then it is very well, and I get government job mighty quick. Now my wife starve and baby to be born. I am poor, miserable boy, fine student, but poor miserable boy. I have many sisters. We live in the country. I will bring my sisters for you to see.”

“Thank you, I don’t wish to see your sisters. You may go.”

“Go, sir? Why go? You have not question me. I have read, I can recite. I ask humble petition for scholarship. I am good man, but poor miserable boy, and my father is poor workman, no good at all. How else shall I live and be a B.A.?”

I rang my bell. I, too, had had an idea, I had suddenly realised that if I were to arrive at the truth at all, the candidates I had seen must not meet those I had not. But it is not *quite* so easy to execute one’s little ideas in India as it is elsewhere. When my clerk appeared, I said: “Take the applicants and put an unused lecture room at their disposal; and keep them in it, see?”

“Put the scholarship grant applicants in the

“A”

I N D I A N

lecture hall, sair? Mr. D—— is giving a lecture on Milton to third-year students in the lecture hall, no doubt, sair.”

“Good Lord, whenever I want anything done in a hurry in this College Mr. D—— is giving a lecture on Milton. But I didn’t say ‘the lecture hall,’ I said ‘a lecture room.’ Put the candidates in one of the theatres in the new science wing.”

“But, sir, that will be very far for them to walk. They will like the fine air of this College, sir. Let them be without upon the lawn, if I may submit.”

“Will you do what you are told?” I snarled.

“Most humbly and obligingly, sair, I will do whatever I am told. I will put the candidates for scholarship grant wherever the Principal shall tell me. I will take this boy with me, sir.”

“No, you won’t. Get out, boy, and do what you’re told.”

The first candidate remained moveless, but trembling. The whole proceeding was a deep mystery to him; but he was no longer confident. He looked very pathetic. When the young clerk had gone, the boy, S—— P—— G——, started to speak again. I had to shut him up somehow. It is a beastly job, this scholarship business. I hate it all. “You will be notified by post in due course,” I said,

“of my decision in respect of your application.”

“Thank you, sir. Oh, thank you, sir. All and everything which I may do for you while I have life I will do humbly, sir.”

“Shut up,” I said. “You will receive my decision by post.”

“Shall I go now?” he said.

“No, wait . . . be quiet,” I answered.

When the clerk came back, I said: “Are all the candidates in the science theatre?”

“Yes, sir, each and every one awaits his turn respectfully in the theatre. Some Moslems will eat their lunch there. Two or three candidates I have retained without to be in readiness for your instant call.”

“Oh, my boy, when will you learn to obey orders? Go and take all the candidates to the science theatre. Do you understand? All. A—double L!”

Still my boy sat on, watching with flicking, quick, unhappy eyes. He was hopeful again, but I think hope with him is an emotion which he can call up at will quite regardless of any reasoning.

At last the young clerk came back, his Brahmin dignity sitting heavily on his narrow shoulders. This time all was clear.



“Now,” I said to the astonished applicant, “now, you may go. You will leave the College compound by the main gate. You will receive my decision by post in due course. Leave your name and address with my clerk who will show you out.”

The boy seemed to be watching a spot on the floor on the far side of my desk. He got up smiling, and started to walk down the room. Suddenly, I remembered the bag of maize, and jumped up. The boy, hearing me move behind him, jumped too, and then turned and smiled at me over his shoulder.

I leaned over my desk and saw the bag on the floor, where the boy had been looking.

“Hi,” I said, “you have forgotten your bag of beans or whatever it is. You mustn’t leave stuff about in my office. I don’t like it.”

The tears mounted slowly into the boy’s eyes, and he came back, beaten by utter puzzlement and disappointment, into a pitiable silence. He picked up the bag and tried to hide his face from me. I was sorry for him, but I cannot decide if he be more tragic than despicable, that anæmic, tearful youth, father of three children born and one yet in the womb.

I think I had meant when I started to write this note to set down the peculiarities of the sixty-odd

applicants: I found four bachelors among them. I gave each a bursary. One of these bachelors was an “untouchable.” We have had “depressed classes” students on the books before, but my new scholar will be the only one since I have been here.

Several of the applicants either had, or thinking to impress me and being puzzled and distressed by my questions, pretended to have two or more wives.

One applicant, twenty-two years old, said that he must have a bursary as he had six children all of whom were dead (either born dead or dead in infancy).

“Why,” I asked, “should this unhappy information affect my decision?”

“I am strong boy,” he said. “But no lucky. When I have scholarship grant I become lucky boy, sir.” And from that I deduced that he would try again.

Oh, India, my India! If only I could do something to help you! Why should I help you? You have a wisdom ages older than mine, adjusted, perhaps, to your climate, to your physical needs, to your social system.

All day long I have worked through a list of

your sons, applicants for my bounty, for my discrimination in respect of public bounty. Never once did I get away from my *idée fixe* that no scholarship allotted by me should support or aid “child marriage.”

But without child marriage your women would need education, and their fathers would need riches. Perhaps I am starting at the wrong end.

At least six of the candidates offered me their sisters or relations for my own gratification, so, so little are we understood.

Understood? Why should I be understood? Have we made a better stand for human happiness with our almost indissoluble contract of marriage, binding together two people for all social purposes, whose need of each other may well be solely biological?

Now that the cold weather has begun, in the mornings I feel so well, so sure, so keen. I take my own little prejudices and inhibitions and taboos and run them up the hill to College and force them down other people’s throats all day; and by the evening I am not so sure.

Perhaps it is a good thing for the prestige of the British Raj that I don’t have to run this college between 9.0 P.M. and 5.0 A.M.

To-morrow and the next day are Hindu festivals, and College is closed, thank God! (I don't know which one).

I shall get on with my new College Filing System. When I am gone what will my Indian successors make of that, I wonder?

Mary will have seen the Taj and perhaps Fatipur Sikri by now. She will have seen another India. The India which rose to become the greatest Empire in the world, flinging its hard, fighting arm over Samarkand, over Persia, over China . . . leaving its tragic memorials behind, the pillared room where, each on his *stylos*, Akbar sat with his councillors, a Moslem, a Hindu, a Buddhist and a Christian.

I wonder what Mary will make of the Taj.

That Italian memorial to a young Moslem beauty. Why is it still there? So many people might have pulled it down. The magic of its beauty must have stayed barbarian hands often, often; and what did Wordsworth say:

“Men are we and must grieve when e'en the  
shade  
Of that which once was great is passed  
away.”



PART THREE

“B”

*A DINNER PARTY AT AGRA*



15<sup>th</sup> November, 1927. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

To-day I saw the Taj. Twice, once in the afternoon, and once again just when the sun had set; but I must leave that until later. I came up with the R——s yesterday.\* E. came to the station to see me off: I felt rather a beast leaving him behind, but, after all, he has already been to Agra twice; and this was really altogether too good an opportunity for me to miss.

I couldn't write my diary last night as we got into the train at eight in the evening, and arrived here at nine this morning: one Indian day lost: I do not think that I shall miss it.

At first I used to hate travelling in India, but now I'm beginning to enjoy it. I like the spaciousness of the sleeping compartments; and the bearer's being next door in his funny little box of a third-class compartment is most convenient. To begin with, it seemed odd and makeshift having to take all my own bedding and an enamel basin with a leather lid

\*R——, the "Collector," had to go to Agra on business, and since he would be busy, his wife asked me to sight-see with her.



containing all my washing paraphernalia; but now I have come to appreciate the luxury of knowing that it is my own clean things which I am using.

Agra looked lovely when we arrived: there is a freshness in the air which is intoxicating after the stuffiness of C——. The leaves on the trees looked as if they'd just been polished; and a little wind was gently lifting them and turning them about as if to show how clean they were.

This hotel seems delightful, clean and comfortable, the waiting at meals excellent and the food good.

I have a room in the annexe, and bearer squats outside it all day, and sleeps there at night.

After tea to-day Mrs. R—— and I drove off to see the “Taj,” in a rather decayed-looking and dirty sort of barouche, with bearer perched up on the box beside the driver, looking very like a monkey.

When we arrived before the gate I asked bearer if he had ever seen the “Taj” before, thinking, of course, that he'd say “Yes,” but, to my surprise, for he told me he had been to Agra several times, he said “No.” So, of course, he had to go in. I don't believe he had understood me, but no Indian servant ever admits to not having understood a question and generally by some miracle they get their answers right. Certainly, bearer to-day made

the right answer, even if he have seen the "Taj" a hundred times before.

How can I describe it? It is exactly like all the photographs I have ever seen of it. Just at first this was somehow a disappointment to me. I suppose I knew that it would, of course, be like its own photographs, yet I had expected more, much more! I had expected to be plunged at once into all the magic atmosphere of Mogul history.

But it all looks so new, so clean, so entirely devoid of any atmosphere.

Then, as you walk up the severely beautiful approach, on the white slabbed marble paths, along which, at regular intervals, are the rectangular basins of still, green water and the cypresses, conventional and decorative in their lines, almost black against all the whiteness, then, gradually, you become aware, more and more aware, of the effort-hiding simplicity which is the grandeur of it all.

See the "Taj" just as the sun has set! Its glaring white is then softened to the colour of a pearl; and it seems to merge into the fast darkening sky like a fairy palace just about to disappear for ever.

And inside, inside in that tremendous hush, you walk lightly, lightly, not to waken those two sleepers.

The old warrior-king lies beneath the smaller

tomb to the left of the great place in the centre: there lies the young queen, who so early put aside her crown and slipped away.

I think of Shah Jahan, in his grief and his despair, making this gigantic, fruitless effort to recapture her, building up this vast monument around the memory of her—a gorgeous cage for the little bird. There is something tragic in his frantic desire to proclaim by this magnificence that she was still a queen, still his. . . .

The “Taj” took thirty years to build, but it must have been many years later still, when he waited as a prisoner in the “Fort,” opposite, on the other side of the bend of the Jumna, that she was really near him. Old, lonely, almost blind, it was then that she must have become again a living presence to him.

As he turned his head, weary with age and suffering, toward the tomb he had raised for her across the bend of the great river she was beside him; and it must have been she who gently led him at the end, across that other great River.

Steep below the “Taj” the Jumna lies, a wide opal streak in the evening, pale, mysterious, fairy-like. The “Fort” is crouched brooding above it, like some old witch, but powerless to disturb its serenity.

Yes, it is a fairy river, apt to fade like the sunset: I shall always be afraid of not finding it there if ever I go again to the “Taj.”\*

Going in to dinner to-night we saw some friends of Mrs. R——, a Colonel and Mrs. Hedges, whom we have met at C—— once or twice; they were dining with two other people who turned out to be a missionary and his wife.

Mrs. Hedges invited us both to sit at her table. Colonel Hedges was up at Agra for a Medical Conference, and she was with him enjoying herself as, I imagine, she would anywhere. She is an attractive woman, not beautiful, but with charm and with a sense of humour, and between forty or fifty, I should think.

He is delightful, large, red-faced and with green twinkling eyes. He told us that during the recent riots at B——, where he is now stationed, they had all had a very busy time checking up the killed and wounded. “There were really thirty-five Hindus and forty-five Moslems killed,” he said. “But, of course, in our official lists they were shown as forty—forty.”

\*Mrs. R—— told me at dinner that the Jumna is one of the dirtiest rivers in India.

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh, because if we didn't give out that an equal number on each side were *hors de combat*, the riots would start all over again, just to level up."

"Doesn't the truth ever leak out?" I asked. "You have lots of Indian doctors, don't you? Can they be trusted to keep their mouths shut?"

"Oh, yes," he answered; "it's easy enough to frighten a Wog. Talk to them like God the Father, and you can manage them all right."

I think that Colonel Hedges belongs more to the last generation than to this. To him all Indians are "Wogs"; and when he is called upon to treat them I am sure he is equally kind and efficient whether they be Hindus or Moslems, Rajahs or sweepers; human animals, yes; but human beings, hardly.

Yet, after all, every good doctor is bound to get like this; but in the good old days I imagine every one must have felt like it about India. Now it is only the doctors who can afford to.

I remember once reading a long and magnificent letter from E.'s father to his mother, dated about 1864, and describing a tiger shoot. Colonel Hedges' conversation was just an echo of this. Colonel Charles always referred to Indians as "niggers,"

never imagining for a moment that any “nigger” was to be trusted in an emergency, and he did his job among them and did it magnificently, without more ado.

But Colonel Charles was a soldier, and Colonel Hedges is a doctor, and perhaps that attitude survives more easily among doctors down into the present generation. A man like Colonel Hedges makes no distinction between Hindu, Moslem or Parsee, though I don't think even Colonel Hedges cares much for an Indian Christian.

To-day, outside the medical service, everyone sees India differently. The average “civilian” sees India full of Moslems, potential fighters, for or against us. The soldier sees India full of tribesmen, potential fighters, too, but *for* us, for the soldier does not understand the “civilian's” doubts. The missionary sees India full of Hindus, potential converts. (No Moslem ever becomes a convert, for that would mean death.) I think that the educationist sees India most clearly as the ghastly muddle which it is. He has to run a school or college for Hindus, Moslems, Parsees and Christians, probably despising them all, and treat them all with equal consideration.

Perhaps, too, it is only the educationist who

realises how dangerous a thing is education; though the soldier seems to share his views and never ceases to blame him for all India's unrest.

I rather hoped Mrs. Missionary, who was on the other side, would not hear Colonel Hedges' remark about God the Father. She was a round, little, grey woman, with a round, little, grey face, rather tired. I don't think she did hear Colonel Hedges. She was busy talking about missionary work to Mrs. R——. They were medical missionaries, it seemed, perhaps in Agra for the Medical Conference.

“It's discouraging work sometimes,” I heard Mrs. Missionary say. “But on the whole, we have much to be thankful for.” She glanced timidly at her husband as she said this. I had a good look at him. He was a real fanatic, saint, call it what you will. He had a fine face, thin and drawn, with deep-set eyes, but rather a hard, tight mouth: both his hair and his eyes, a strange light grey, were rather wild. He heard his wife's remark; and turned his eyes on her sternly,

“We have much, much to thank God for,” he said.

I think that that must have been his first utterance that evening, judging by the glance Colonel Hedges directed toward him.

"Have you any children?" asked Mrs. Hedges, tactfully. "Yes, three," answered Mrs. Peters. She almost sighed, but just managed to check herself. "Three. They are all in England, of course. Two boys and a girl. We haven't seen them for five years. Our little girl was only three when we left her. She will have quite forgotten us."

I couldn't help looking at Mr. Peters to see if the mention of his children had softened that gleaming eye at all. It had not. "My wife had the opportunity of going home a year ago to see the children," he said; "she preferred to stay out here with me." Poor little gentle woman, I thought. How could such a little mouse stand up to those hypnotic eyes? I pitied her deeply. She was obviously born to be a mother first and foremost, and here she was, so long as life should last, forced to be the helpmate of a fanatic missionary. She talked about her children during the rest of the meal, and became quite lively and happy-looking by the end of it. Mr. Peters occasionally made some remark apropos of his missionary work, in a deep booming voice; and they both left immediately after dinner. Mr. Peters was going to give a magic-lantern lecture to some Hindu students. We all got quite uneasy when he said grace. He said it aloud, with long pauses



between each word, so I suppose that it must have been extemporary. My attention wandered a little during it, but I am almost sure that he asked for God's blessing on the magic-lantern lecture.

When they had left we all sat out on the verandah, and discussed missionaries and their work.

“These medical missionaries are all right,” said Colonel Hedges. “At least, they would be all right if they'd stick to the medical side and leave the ‘word of God’ alone. I can't quite make up my mind if the good they do by their medical work is undone by the harm of their Christian teaching.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. R——, “I think that, on the whole, the good they do is far greater than the harm. They save thousands of lives a year, and give a certain amount of happiness; and, after all, what harm do they do, if they try to teach these poor wretches to be Christians?”

“Well, I never believe in monkeying with other people's religions. It makes for a lot of hypocrisy, and muddles up the poor ‘Wog’ even more than he is muddled up already. All that most of them get hold of is the idea that if they are christened, say prayers and grace (and, my God, what a grace we had to-day!) they'll get proper medical attention and various benefits in the way of clothes, food, Christ-

mas trees and so on."

"Not that we run down the missionaries," put in Mrs. Hedges. "As a whole, they're a fine, unselfish lot. Mr. Peters, now, terribly irksome at the dinner-table, and, I'm sure, an impossible man to live with, is nevertheless, in his way, a saint. Quite selfless, hard-working, conscientious, you can't help admiring, perhaps even rather respecting him."

"Well, I thought him selfish," I said. "Quite regardless of his wife's feelings. It didn't take anyone long to see that she was hungering for her children, yet he separates her from them without a qualm."

"Yes," said Mrs. Hedges; "but all people with one idea are like that. They sacrifice themselves and everyone around them for the sake of it. Anyway, Mrs. Peters was obviously born to be sacrificed: it's lucky she hasn't fallen into worse hands."

Yes, thinking it over, I believe Mrs. Hedges was the most remarkable person at that little dinner party, and the most typical, too. She hates the Indian and accepts him as a Catholic hates and accepts original sin. Her father and her grandfather were distinguished members of the Indian Civil Service; she has married a distinguished member of the Indian Medical Service; her son is at Winchester

learning to be a distinguished member of the Indian Services, if they last long enough. For generations she and hers have given their best to India, and never thought for a moment that they were giving their best to Indians.

Ever since I've been back in my room I've felt depressed. Thinking about India must make anyone sad. If I were a man and had to live in India, I should choose to be a doctor. It seems to me that saving these poor creatures from physical suffering is about all that one can do. Here, in a great city like Agra, I shan't be bothered by jackals howling, so I must make the most of a long night.

PART FOUR

“A”

*THE EDUCATION OF A PRINCIPAL*



*17th November, 1927.*

To-day is the last day of the Hindu Festival, and to-morrow we shall see the fun . . . or shan't.

There has been some dagger-work in the bazaar, apparently. The Collector has been up there, rushing about. I wonder what good he does. His young assistant, G——, of course, thinks it just fun. But R—— hasn't the folly to think it "Life," with a capital letter, or the wisdom to "let it be"; and after all, that sort of wisdom is pretty nearly absolute. There will be few who will sit and watch their navels on Judgment Day.

Mary got back this morning, tired after her night in the train, and she has felt unrest in the air all day, and talked spasmodically about the throb of Hindu drums and temples. She misses the heavy hush of Agra, but that is death, too, of another kind. Mary doesn't know anything about the likelihood of riots breaking out, and, for that matter, nor do I.

The Collector, when I went to see him to-day about the new building, was worried and had one revolver on the table and another in his belt,

because he had just got back from a tour with the police of the bazaar.

It may be all “hot air.” Two Moslems have been knifed; that is all. And everything is muted and still except the temple drums at sacrificial hours.

I spent most of to-day at the file with S—— G——, who tells me his “stomach is enjoying grateful repose, after much strife.” I prefer the Oriental allegory to any European precision in these matters.

If any riot breaks out, and “communal feeling” appears to be strong in —— Province, then my students will “play me up.” There isn’t much I can get hold of; but anyway I can cling to these notes. I have a strong conviction that one day they may stand me in good stead.

I wonder whether I ought to judge from that that keeping a spasmodic diary is an act of cowardice or of courage. Keeping a regular diary is, of course, simply a nervous disease, but rather engaging and endearing like a perpetual blink.

At three o’clock this afternoon I had a visit in my office from an Indian Christian, who brought me his two daughters to examine.

One of them was about nineteen, and married to another Christian. I didn’t gather what the hus-

band's profession might be, beyond his profession of faith: I didn't gather where he lived, nor what he was doing to-day while his wife was being "paraded" in my office.

She was a pretty girl, though not so exquisitely little and appealing as her younger sister, who was seventeen years old, and still looking for her "Christian."

Both the girls were dressed up as twins, and in "Christian" clothes. My God, what clothes our Church sponsors in India! A pink cotton blouse, a yellow and black striped skirt, the stripes running across the figure and being an inch wide, so as to make the slimmest child look grotesquely fat across her nether quarters; a black and white straw hat with a six-inch brim and a pale magenta gauze veil.

The veil, of course, as the girls were Christians, was only a bit of nonsense, and was turned up on to their hats by the father as soon as the children were seated in my office.

The father, apparently, was acting as a kind of showman, and would not sit down for a long time, but walked about behind my desk between his two daughters, showing off their "points," patting up their chins, stroking their cheeks and chafing their hands.



Being of a naturally cynical and suspicious disposition, I am afraid that I assumed from the start that one or other or both of these young ladies was for disposal in some way. I was taken very much by surprise by the visit; and the visitors were announced very unceremoniously by my second clerk, and were then immediately thrust upon me before I could refuse to see them.

I suppose that my clerk was heavily tipped.

Later on, however, when I had been told about twenty times, and was finally deemed to have understood that the girls and their father were Christians, I was permitted to gather that the father was trying to give the children a university education at home, and had come to consult me about their reading, and to ask me to set them a number of books to prepare and, after an appropriate lapse of time, an examination on what they had read.

I suggested a few books, and ventured, after a great deal of encouragement (“Won’t you, sair, speak to the little girls themselves? They are so sweetly gentle, sair. Speak to them, Mr. Principal, they are but my children, sweet and shy. . . . Make them your humble allowance, Mr. Principal, and speak to them. They will answer you most assuredly and humbly, Mr. Principal. Speak to

either of them, Mr. Principal. It does not matter which. Yes, no, Mr. Principal?”), to put some simple questions to the girls themselves.

The whole thing was like a Chelsea party with a woman exhibiting a pair of Pekinese dogs. “Oh, but they’re too sweet: they bark a little at strangers: I always think that’s so clever, don’t you, Mr. Charles? But, of course, as soon as they see that you’re an intelligent man and appreciate them, they’ll let you do anything to them.”

The girls giggled a little when I first spoke to them directly, but that may have been my fault for taking so long about it. As soon as they had got over the slight girlish flutter which such exciting names as Hardy and Tolstoi naturally create in young Indian “Christians,” they became intelligent and interesting. The younger child put her hands on my desk and leaned over earnestly and, looking down at the grain of the wood, asked me to explain how it was that Russian literature should make almost the only real bridge over which Eastern students could pass to the Western art forms.

I hadn’t, of course, any idea how to answer this gentle little child, with her fierce curiosity: all the time I wondered hopelessly if the curiosity could be genuine. The elder girl, however, with the cares of

matrimony already upon her, became flaccid; and that, anyway, looked genuine. Father said that the girls mustn't talk about Russia; but I reminded him that I had first mentioned Tolstoi. The father's English was as florid and stupid as my young clerk's; but the girls spoke quite simply. They seemed to me to be far more intelligent and less gaudy-minded than any student in this College. They told me that they made and embroidered dolls' clothes for sale; but I did not see any of their work.

Quite suddenly the father dropped their veils over their faces, and poked them each into an upright position, stretched out his hand to me, shook mine sententiously, took out of his coat pocket a small packet of tea, placed this on my desk, and shooing his children before him, fluttered, his arms outspread, out of my office with no more ado or reason for his going than there had been for his appearance.

This is a queer country.

After this odd interruption I went off with cheque-books “A” and “C” in my pocket, to get R——'s (the Collector R——, not the Vakil) counter-signature on a big cheque to the contractors.

I found R—— all surrounded by runners and telegraph peons, with his revolvers much in evidence. He told me, amongst other things, and between bouts of extreme nervous irritability with his clerks, that two of my professors here have a bad name in the police books, and that he would send up half a dozen pots of his perfectly lovely chrysanthemums for Mary. I don't suppose that he'll remember.

Young G——, who is living with him, very much on the “camp bed” (why is R—— so graceless; for he is a fine man, really?) took me off to have tea in the drawing-room and gave me tea. Mrs. R—— was lying down after her journey from Agra.

Then young G—— came with me, for a change of air, to the bank where I had to cash the other much smaller cheque on “C” account, for to-morrow is pay-day.

The bank was closed or closing, but G—— P——, the manager, took us into his bungalow and gave us whisky, and somebody presently appeared with the cash, sixteen hundred rupees odd, which I put into a bag, while G—— P—— began to talk about the movement of bullion. It struck me as intensely funny at the time that I with my hundred pounds in dirty notes and with filthy “tonga” waiting at the

door, should suggest the movement of bullion to G—— P——.

He was interesting, however, and young G—— was an intelligent listener, and when we went out together both our heads were full of exchange rates and gold, and silver markets and their use for currency stabilisation.

And India, thrifty because poor *per capita*, in just the same way as France is poor and thrifty, is, we understood, the great steadying ballast of the Eastern gold markets. . . . A hoarder, as France would be a hoarder if she could (and perhaps she is), and yet mysteriously a great consumer. A competitor of Japan, yet she manages to be hardly a competitor of Lancashire in normal times, and, withal, an entirely free economic unit within and without the Empire.

G—— came back to College with me because I was “moving bullion” . . . (I had, indeed, several pieces of silver). On the way back we saw an astonishing scene.

Where the road cuts through a large guava plantation an old stray cow was nuzzling along the side of the road supporting her shrunken body against the trees, her heavy eyes already glazing to the last indifference, which death is so often and so

mercifully in the animal kingdom.

On the other side of the road a woman was walking toward us, withered and haggard too, but carrying her own stick for support, and her eyes still lively enough to be greedy.

Simultaneously, the cow and the woman saw in the middle of the road, ten yards before our horse's head, a patch of cow-dung.

It is said that animals never eat the dung of their own kind; but whoever has said this cannot have known Indian poverty.

The cow, scenting the only meal anywhere available for her (and she is a sacred beast, destined, therefore, now that she is old and useless to man, to linger on till even starvation becomes merciful, for no human hand will help her out of her suffering) lurched into the middle of the road and stooped over the dung of some richer neighbour.

At the same moment the old woman rushed out from the other side and raised her stick to beat off her rival, for she was out collecting cow-dung to floor her hovel somewhere behind the guava trees.

She hit the cow savagely across the face, and the old beast subsided on to her knees above the precious deposit.

Our “tonga” swerved violently to avoid a

collision, and I was thrown back, and to the right over the back step on to the dusty road, where I lay beside my £100 in its bag beside the old cow and before the feet of the old hag.

I got up quickly, as if impelled by some instinctive fear of contamination. The woman, seeing what she had done, fell upon her knees in the road to ask my pardon in a wild flow of not unrhythmic words. The cow bent lower and lower in the dust, but had overreached the mark and seemed powerless to draw her knees back so that her head might be above her prospective meal.

In all the excitement young G—— was only led to exclaim: “Well, I’m damned, if that doesn’t take the biscuit!” or some other such happy vulgarism of the young and the enthusiastic.

In my embarrassment I was only led to exclaim: “Damn the fellow’s driving. I shall look a pretty sight when we get back to College. Just look at the knees of my trousers,” or some other such preposterous and inadequate grumble of the nervous and the dyspeptic.

The “tonga” driver jumped down from his box and slashed at his horse a good deal, as if that might do some good, and then, picking up the bag of money, while I flicked at my white trousers with my

handkerchief, placed it humbly on young G——’s knees like a priest replacing a chalice upon the altar.

The old woman remained upon her knees in the road. Slowly enough the unuttered, unutterable pathos of the scene began to dawn upon me.

I made a sign with my hand to the old woman, but she paid no heed, and I climbed back into the “tonga.” The driver now saw a clear way round behind the back of the cow, and prodding his horse with his whip handle in that filthy way which seems to every Indian driver his natural prerogative over his beast,\* we lurched forward again, out of the guava tree shade into the main cantonment’s road, and presently up the wide drive to College, where I put the money in the safe.

Night was falling, and when I had changed, young G—— took me down to the club. There I heard gossip about the Commissioner’s tiger shoot, and no mention of the threatened “hartal”† or of any rioting.

Perhaps it is all quiet again, but when I got back here I heard the drums. India is savage to-night, for all her vaults of gold. Quietly savage, perhaps, but savage; and my “chokhidar”‡ is no doubt sleeping.

\*The handle of the whip is driven up the patulus anus of a male beast and often into the vagina of a female beast.

†Hartal—lock-out or boycott.

‡Chokhidar—night-watchman.



What use would he be, anyway?

I wonder whether the white population is in the least concerned with India: I hardly think so: they have their work to do, whatever it may be. Riots and hartals are all stuff and nonsense to them; but one day, who can tell?

Among my mail this morning were two anonymous letters and one anonymous postcard . . . chiefly vulgar abuse; but the “Hindu Literary Society” is obviously upset that I have banned their play, which seems to have been chosen with the express object of giving offence to the Moslems.

I ought not to read anonymous letters: everybody receives them in this country; but I somehow feel that an educationist cannot afford to take the same line that a “civilian” may take. A “civilian” is administering his own code in a foreign land: I am looking after a purely Indian institution.

Yet the “Satyagraha,” or whatever it is called, has not the slightest legitimate grouse against me for forbidding their offensive play, which even the dear old M—— K—— (Senior Professor and Professor of Persian, and leader of the Moslem Community in College and in the city) declared must have been chosen from the vast mass of Hindu literature,

most of which would have been innocuous, simply to give offence.

After all, too, anonymous letters obviously can't even reflect the opinion of any but curs. I dislike postcards more than letters. Mary picks them up and is worried by them, though she finds them funnier than I do, and wants to make a collection.

The pupil I dismissed is *appealing about* a great deal. I get letters about him from Bombay and Delhi, and fiddle-de-dee, and he writes to me every day himself, his language more picturesque each time. Perhaps he writes the anonymous letters too.

India is no place for me. Why did I ever come? There is more lying, dirt, meanness and cowardice than I would have believed possible in any community, and yet it is not just foul, it is sad, too, this people, these many peoples, struggling to be articulate and trusting themselves to this generation of half-baked undergraduates for prophets and spokesmen.

All India is unknowing how it is daily sold by its young men, these puppies who alone are able to be articulate at all, and that because their fathers have done an honest life's work, that their sons may yell away a constitution on the strength of an Indian University Degree.



PART FOUR

“B”

*CREATURES*



17th November, 1927. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

This morning I got back home again at about nine o'clock. E. met us at the station. I think he looks very tired, but he says he feels well. As we drove in at the gate in a tonga which seemed to jolt more than usual, after the barouches of Agra, we heard a great deal of shouting; and having got down at the front door we went to find out what it might all be about.

Our half-witted bhisti was clinging on to the tail of a strong young calf, while the sweeper embraced it round the middle. A gardener and a punka-coolie were trying to lasso it, both from about thirty yards. All were very serious. I could not help laughing at the dogged way in which the bhisti clung on to the tail, despite the calf's wild plungings. It surprised me, too, for he is far the laziest of all our servants. Then E. explained that so many creatures had strayed into our compound lately, bullocks, cows and goats, that he had given orders that every one that came in should be caught and tethered in a corner of the servants' compound, and that when

the owner came to reclaim his property he should be made to pay a fine of one rupee, eight annas for a bullock or cow, and of one rupee for a goat for each day that they had been allowed to stay there. Half the money from these fines is to go to the College, the other half is to be equally divided between the servants responsible for the captures. Hence their frantic efforts to secure the calf. E. said that he had been forced to make this rule because unless he devised a recognised method of penalising the owners the whole College property would be overrun with cattle, whose owners would thus be saved the time and expense of finding other and legitimate pasture.

I can see what a delight this new pastime will be for our servants. I saw bearer's eyes gleaming as he heard E.'s explanation over the breakfast-table.

I must tell cook about the breakfast dish Mrs. R—— told me of.

Bake a large potato: cut it in half and scoop out each half, allowing enough thickness to the walls to prevent sagging. Put a spoonful of grated cheese and a pinch of Cayenne pepper into each half and carefully break an egg into each of them. (The egg will just fill the space.) Cover with more grated cheese and breadcrumbs and put back carefully

under a hot grill for three or four minutes till the cheese is browned, or into the oven for about six minutes. Thin small slices of gherkin finish off the dish.

Mrs. R—— says it is delicious, and I am sure it is.

It is good to be back again. I wish E. did not have such a worrying time at College; and I can't help feeling it's all for nothing. All the professors and three-quarters of the students would rather not have any sort of English Principal; while the odd few students who think that they appreciate and want an Englishman only expect from him some queer, out-of-the-way polish and pedantry in English literary appreciation, which they fondly imagine that they wouldn't get from an Indian. Their idea of English literary culture seems, anyway, to be to learn pages of poetry off by heart to quote, without the slightest relevance, every time they make any request to a superior. They haven't the smallest intention or wish to get down to fundamentals. They don't even begin to know what education means; nor do they care. All they want is a sort of superficial polish, a smattering of names and verses which may enable them to deceive a few English people and impress their friends and relatives, who have not had the conceit to go to “college.”



Yet E. is really interested in the College: he has found so many, many things that need altering and improving, particularly everything connected with the sanitation and hygiene; and he is really getting down to the business of making this, as far as he can, a clean and healthy College.

I am sure that not only do the Indians not want this, but that they actually resent it. They do not at all realise that he is paying them the highest compliment of being sincerely interested in all that concerns their welfare, physical as well as mental. I wonder if they could ever be made to realise that E. is acting as, say, the headmaster of every good English school would act, and, if so, whether that would carry any weight with them. I doubt it. They would much prefer either a weak, lazy Englishman, who spent his life refusing to see unpleasant facts, or, of course, a Hindu whose mind would work in the tortuous, slippery way they understand so well.

E. is full of hope and energy, but I can't help feeling that coping with the dirt and deceit of an Indian College is a tragic way of wearing out one's life. Truly, the educationist in India has a hard nut to crack.

I was very glad to see that the mongoose's saucer

of milk had not been forgotten while I was away. I forgot to tell anybody about it, but E. must have seen to it himself, for there the little man was, just finishing his breakfast when I got into the house: then he slipped off, running in his stealthy, busy little way into the long grass. I like to have him about, ugly though he be, because he's such a good protection against cobras, and because he has a nice, commonplace, domestic appearance, so unlike most Indian creatures.

I don't know whether it is a male or a female; but I hope it may be a female, so that one day she may lead a neat little line of baby mongeese up on to the verandah to share the saucer of milk.

I always think of them as the hedgehogs of Indian gardens, and hedgehogs love to parade the garden with a string of young trotting sedately behind.

A note from D—— and a basket of fruit welcomed my arrival home. Very kind of him. All his notes begin in the same way: “Dear Madam, herewith a few fresh fruits which I hope you will be good enough to accept.” I must remember to send him some “fresh fruits,” but I'm afraid they'll have to be vegetables.

The cook told me to-day that a blue jay had built its nest in the cook-house chimney. I think that

rather delightful, but he didn't seem to think so. They must be rather a foolish pair of birds. I do hope they'll be able to rear their family in safety. I have visions of the young ones falling into saucepans of boiling soup.

I very much wanted to ask cook to save me any blue jay feathers which may flutter down the chimney, but I felt that in order to get them he would as likely as not kill the birds.

He is rather a sinister Moslem, dignified and good-looking, and an excellent cook when he wants to be. He has had two wives, who are now dead, and two now living with him in the compound, but no children. The bearer tells us that he's a great gambler: I have always thought he would have made an excellent soldier, which is perhaps very much the same thing.

I was touched to see the gardener's arrangement of flowers. On the dining-room table was the Malay silver bowl with six roses, all their stalks exactly the same length, sticking straight up in the leaden holder in the middle, in a prim, uncomfortable way; and on the mantelpiece in the drawing-room two small vases of balsams squeezed in tightly, only their heads peering out, looking anxious and half suffocated.

Of all the flowers in the world I like balsams least; tawdry and crude, although they manage to struggle along even in the greatest heat, they never look well or happy. One longs to give them a strong tonic, or better still, root them up and throw them on to the rubbish heap. I fancy I have much the same feeling for balsams as Mrs. Hedges has for Indians.

The garden appears to be still free of monkeys, so the sweet-pea seedlings really have made some growth.

The vegetables are doing well. Peas flourish here, we are told, but not beans. At present our beans look very well. I wonder when they will begin to flag or to break out into spots.

This evening we have sat and read since our usual walk in the garden: E. read aloud a little; but Indian evenings are mysterious and frightening. Always in this bungalow we hear the steady, sinister drumming coming from the Temple of Kali, the Goddess of Destruction, which is on the outskirts of the native bazaar.

At times the noise gets louder, seems to come closer and then recedes again; and sometimes, when the breeze is blowing it away from us, it seems to stop altogether and we heave a sigh of relief.

All the world over the sound of throbbing drums disturbs Western people. In Africa, the sound of native drums beaten heavily and monotonously is terrible.

I always feel when these drums of Kali start that one day they will begin and get wilder and louder, until all India is aflame, intoxicated by their subtle, rousing call; and that then, indeed, Kali's thirst will be slaked by the blood and slaughter which will follow.

Some nights the noise seems more insistent and potent than on others, as though a dark influence were at work, poisoning and inflaming the souls of the drummers. To-night, as I sit writing here, I can feel that there is something evil abroad, something electric which has generated, perhaps, in the mind of some priest of Kali thousands of miles away.

Perhaps I am more sensitive to all this to-night, because I am back within audible range of a Hindu temple, back from the lovely hush of that great Moslem Mosque in the city of Akbar and of Shah Jahan.

I don't believe that I shall ever get used to the sound of these drums. The messages they send out are as real as any Western telegram, but they are always sent out in code.

To-morrow, very probably, the sound will be quite different, drowsy and meaningless as though the drummers were beating absent-mindedly, thinking of nothing in particular.

It is a relief to be able to turn away from them, to watch the “chi-chis,” little grey lizards which run up the walls at night to catch flies.

This they do with amazing rapidity, shooting out a tiny tongue and drawing it back complete with fly so quickly that I cannot properly follow the movement. I have been watching them for the last ten minutes. They make a funny little noise, half click, half chirp: it is most entertaining to watch them stalk their prey. The fly, drowsy and replete by the time evening has come, stays glued to the wall while the “chi-chi,” active after his day’s rest, moves nearer like a shadow by exactly the line along which the fly cannot see him.

It is very hard indeed to detect the “chi-chi” moving.

You turn your head away for a second; and when you look again the “chi-chi” is an inch nearer his victim. He never gets very near the fly before he reaches forward and darts out his tongue. It is always a surprise to me when the end comes so soon, the “chi-chi” about four inches from the fly.

Sometimes the fly gets away, but not very often.

For the last week we have had a regular visitor, calling at about nine o'clock, a small, solemn toad. He pauses and reflects a long time between each hop. He, too, is a fly-catcher, but his methods are different. He sits immobile and seems to hypnotise the flies to within striking distance. Either he does this, or, being an acute psychologist, he is aware of the foolish curiosity of flies which drives them like fate to investigate anything living and motionless.

He never stays with us very long; but ranges the room thoroughly, and then withdraws deliberately, hop by hop, into the night. I have seldom seen so small a toad before: perhaps he is a young one. I feel that his visits are really only an evening's amusement to him, not a necessary, grim hunt for his supper, and that when he is older and wiser he will leave us: I somehow feel that he gets his real dinner somewhere else in the day-time, that coming to us is, as it were, like dropping in to a brightly lighted café on his evening stroll.

Now that wailing menacing howl of jackals has begun. I did not have it at Agra. Generally, they come later. They must be in the garden, in front of the bungalow; I have just heard E. go out, I suppose to shoot in their direction.

The noise they make is a terrible sound, like the cry of lost demons. What hateful creatures they are! I don't know why they rush round into compounds; but I suppose they hope to find something to feed on in any inhabited part. Of course the prevalence of rabies in India is due to them. Hunger or thirst drives them mad and they bite some pariah dog and so it begins. Well, I must try not to think about them any more. Luckily, we haven't a dog; but I know my dreams will be haunted to-night by the throb of the drums of Kali and the howls of jackals, two typical sounds of an Indian night.





PART FIVE

“A”

“*TIGHT WATER*”



18th November, 1927.

When I got to the office this morning S—— G—— was there in the room, all blown out with contained words, like a stuttering bagpipe.

“Sair,” he exclaimed, as I lifted the mosquito curtain, “sair, we are all in tight water.”

Never have I known Indian inventiveness more apt or easy, more simple, more appropriate. Is it possible to find any epithet more fitting for water than “tight”?

Does not water always fill up, tighten out into every nook and cranny? I thought of myself bursting into the tight, compact body of still water lying across my bath, scattering it, flinging it, raising it; and then I thought how the water would win in the end, and form a new compact, tight level above my body, calm and smooth-stretched from side to side across the bath.

“Yes, Mr. Principal, sair; envy, malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness are before us. So have the ignominious students most ruthlessly repaid your noble endeavour. They are without gratitude within their hearts.

“I do not know what they will ask, for they are very fierce and wild, and no man dare approach them. Oh, sair, each and every student is on strike throughout the length and breadth of this College; and this is surely a most disastrous thing, and evil conduct before the winter examination.”

“May I come in?” called the twinkling voice of Mr. D—— from the back verandah, behind my office . . . and when he had taken that liberty, his voice went on, addressing S—— G——: “Don’t talk rubbish, S—— G——, the students have doubtless been reading *Coriolanus*. Mr. Principal will, I daresay, speak to them from the terrace.”

I was a little confused, and said:

“On strike? But we do not employ the students.”

“Oh, sair,” wailed S—— G——, “the students are even now, each and every one of them, all striking upon the upper lawns.”

“Some students are addressing the crowd upon chairs which they have carried out,” said Mr. D——. “It is all very foolish and ill-mannered. They imagine that they are ‘on strike,’ Mr. Principal.”

I sat down in my chair because I was honestly puzzled.

“Now,” I said, “what is all this excitement

about? The students can't be 'on strike' as you call it, for we don't employ them: they employ us. Do you wish me to understand that the children have declared a 'lock-out' of the professors?"

Mr. D—— simply bubbled with good humour. My question, or perhaps my reference to the students as children, enchanted him, tickled the very roots of fun in him. He rocked to and fro for some time, and I caught the infection of his mirth. S—— G—— watched us, his face contorting in agony, then suddenly he threw his fat black hands dramatically into the air and "held the pose," as film producers say.

When his silent chuckles had subsided a little Mr. D—— said: "Those students have neglected to lock *me* out, Mr. Principal." Then he subsided into the gratification of speechless mirth again.

"Alas," called S—— G——, "alas, it is maybe the Hindu Literary Society, or, I daresay, it is the boy whom you dismissed with fine ruthless justice, Mr. Principal, sair . . . I am closely mixed in with you, Mr. Principal, as a hand and glove; and how shall I dare go home, for those students are most wild and insistent?"

"Oh, Mr. Principal, sair, will you not put a stop to them and blot them out most utterly, Mr. Principal;

for how else shall I keep the office secrets?

“Will not the angry students clamour upon me and do me mischief?”

“Go away, for goodness’ sake, S—— G——,” I said. “I can’t get at anything with you here.”

“The students,” said Mr. D——, when S—— G—— had gone, “need a firm word from you, Mr. Principal; they are upon the lawns.

“We may pass unseen through the upper cloisters and come out abruptly above them on the terrace, whence, I dare say, you will address them. They are not attending their lectures and the professors are destitute of pupils, each within his lecture room, awaiting your firm hand.

“Nobody can tell, Mr. Principal, what the students are wanting; but a humble petition in writing to you is no doubt more fitting than this uproar.

“There was, I am credibly informed, some rioting in the city last night; and so I daresay that some Hindus have been murdered by the Moslems.

“Those students are talking to keep Hindus and Moslems united against good discipline; but they will soon crumble to shame under your eloquent address.”

“Come,” I said, “if the students are not in their

lecture rooms and are not submitting to the rules of this College, then they are clearly trespassers upon private property. They are licensees here, upon the sole condition that they observe our rules. There's quite enough 'hot air' talked by us all in this place, without the students adding to it. Come along with me, Mr. D——.”

Mr. D—— rose and we walked together through the empty cloisters past the echoing lecture rooms, and came out on to the terrace. At our appearance there was a momentary hush among the crowd of five hundred excited youths, and then more babble.

I took out my watch, and said at the top of my voice, which sounded reedy and thin enough to me:

“It is ten minutes past nine. You must go immediately to your lectures where your professors are waiting for you.

“If you have something to say to me, I will meet your representatives in the main lecture hall at midday.

“You have two minutes to break up and get back into College. Hurry!”

Perhaps if I had given them five minutes they would have gone. It is hard to know. Perhaps if I had said nothing more and waited silently, giving them officially my two minutes, but allowing them



in fact a margin of a minute or two, they would have gone.

But it is of no use thinking of possibilities. A man must and does act as his nerves prompt him to act at any given moment. There can be no looking back. There are no such things as mistakes, after the one mistake of appointing so-and-so to such-and-such a position.

Any given appointment may be a “mistake,” but the appointee’s conduct can never be a mistake. He will do what he must do, being what he is. There is, in the hurry of an emergency, no choice.

General Dyer’s conduct at Jalianwalabah was not a mistake. He acted as he understood that he must act, whether knowing or not knowing that there was a blind alley before him, whether meaning the shots of his soldiers to go over the heads or into the heads of the crowd in front.

It may, or may not have been a mistake to have summoned General Dyer to those particular riots; but that was the only possible mistake, for General Dyer *was* what General Dyer *is*, whether good or bad, wise or foolish.

The same Dyer, that is, the Dyer of before Jalianwalabah, would act to-day or to-morrow at a new Jalianwalabah as he acted years ago. Of course

the new Dyer, that is, the Dyer plus the experience of his Jalianwalabah, might act differently.

I did not, perhaps, give the students time to calm down, for, at intervals of twenty seconds, I broke the absolute silence which followed my remarks.

“Twenty seconds!” I announced.

“Forty seconds!”

“Sixty seconds! You’d better hurry!”

When the two minutes had run out, I said:

“Very well, you have had your time. Now get out. This College is private property. You are admitted to it solely upon the condition that you obey my rules and orders. You have disobeyed them: now you must get out. The College will be closed to-day. To-morrow the College will be open as usual, and each day during term time after to-morrow. The professors will be here waiting to give their lectures; and you may come back as, and when you will, whether singly or in a body.

“The attendance sheets will be kept as usual, and eligibility for the winter examination will depend upon individual attendance. I shall not ask the senate for any dispensation in your favour.

“Now you must go!”

“What about the boarders?” asked Mr. D—— in a whisper into my ear, which made me jump, for

I had forgotten that I was not alone upon the terrace.

“The boarders,” I yelled, “may use their hostel, but the rest of the College estate will be out of bounds for them also until they attend lectures.”

This last remark was, however, lost in the babble which had now broken out.

Nobody made any move to go; and one or two of the students who had brought chairs out with them now climbed on to these to address the rest.

The shouting became deafening. Behind me I could just hear one or two of the professors, drawn out by curiosity, come panting on to the terrace.

I stepped down, and with my shooting-stick pointed along the main drive.

Somebody threw a thin bamboo stick at me, and missed me, and there was a rush forward of several of the students to collect the stick from the grass behind me, I suppose lest it should form evidence against them.

For a moment the babble continued. I made a circling movement with my stick, and held it out to encompass the crowd; and imperceptibly the whole body began to move.

When we reached the gate, which must be a good quarter of a mile from the lawns, there was a

moment's jam . . . somebody said:

“Tyranny and wickedness. Is not this an abomination, for with free students who shall use force and compulsion?”

Another voice in the crowd in front of me said:

“He will be tired and he will sit upon his stick; like a sweeper he carries his own chair.”

When the last of the “free students” was through the gate, I shut it myself, and shot the bolt home to the cry, which caught like fire in stubble and swept the crowd, of “Chokhidar.”\*

I turned and walked back, and found that I had been alone: Mr. D—— had stayed upon the terrace. Behind me I heard students throwing stones at the gates.

Mr. D—— came down and said: “Mr. Principal, sir, that was a most splendid scene: most biblical, I can assure: the good shepherd and his sheep.”

“Oh come, Mr. D——,” I said. “I should have thought Moses and his rod: didn't you hear the water gushing out?”

The teaching staff promised to be punctual at College to-morrow; and I instructed them to be available whether students appeared or not throughout the whole working day and to give their

\* Chokhidar—Night-watchman.

lectures if any single student presented himself.

Then I collected a “tonga” and went down to report to R—— (the Collector), and to the Commissioner of Police; and by the time that I had done that it was one o’clock, and I went back to lunch.

Mary wasn’t too pleased either with the position of this bungalow, which is too near the native city, or with the position of a College Principal, whose students may cause a riot and the loss of many lives.

Strangely enough, however, since the curfew order was put into force a day or two ago the bazaar has been quiet.

At about five o’clock I got the attached report from the Commissioner of Police, with a covering letter in truly British army style.

*“Herewith please find original report from native sub-commissioner on the activities of students of C—— College in the city since leaving College premises this morning, for your information and guidance, please.*

C. T. H.”

So that, of course, is that. If the two professors involved appear at College to-morrow, I had better sack them at once and get the sanction of the senate afterwards.

Having to sack a couple of professors will mean

that the strike will go on for a week or more, no doubt.

Unfortunately, I can't sack R—— and R—— T——\* from the Governing Body, yet nobody in his senses doubts that the whole business is organised by them. R——'s newspaper had an article about me last week that I should have thought was libellous.

I have never, thank God, seen this son of R—— T——, who has “always led successful strikes of students in all colleges where he was educated.” I like almost all the wording of the report; but it's of no use being amused by this thing, so far it *is* only a gentle entertainment, but, if the Moslems come back to-morrow, as the police report suggests they may, I shall indeed be in “tight water,” for I can't refuse to admit my hundred and fifty odd Moslem students, who anyway have always played the game by me, according to their lights; but by admitting them I shall immediately acquire a partisan reputation.

Well, perhaps even that is an honour in India.

Sir,—

*For your information and necessary action, please, I have honour to make following precise report upon*

\*Two Hindu members of governing body and Managing Committee.  
(See Part II, “A,” above.)

activities of C—— College students, same being now on strike in defiance of College Principal, same being a European, Mr. Edward Charles, well known to your goodself.

Same students having been gathered in city have twice constituted public meeting.

I personally and with much discretion followed procession to house of Mr. R—— T——, where with riotous yelling students hailed Mr. R—— T—— Vakil, and member of College Government.

Mr. T——, son of Mr. R—— T——, addressed massed students for space of one hour.

He said he had been student at Lahore and Calcutta Colleges and had always led successful strikes of students in all colleges where he was educated. He urged all students to continue striking with fortitude and resistance and told same they would win honour for young India. After this he mingled with the students as one man. Several students spoke, but I was unable to get names of these.

A Moslem student spoke, asking students why all were striking and saying that Hindu students had led out Moslems, these same having no time to speak publicly and not knowing true cause or reason. He asked if the strike was against Principal on account of drinking vessels.

Students were very noisy to this, and other Moslem student trying to speak was howled down and struck some

*severe blows with lathi.*

*I did not interfere but watched activities keenly, there being no blood.*

Mr. R—— T—— came to verandah of house and bowed to students, who made uproar. Mr. R—— T—— did not speak. His son spoke again, promising students all support and proposed to send telegrams to (1) Mr. R——'s paper, (2) The Vice-Chancellor of University, (3) Headquarters Young India Movement. Same to read as follows:

STUDENTS OF C—— COLLEGE ON STRIKE AGAINST AUTOCRATIC TREATMENT ENGLISH PRINCIPAL ASK YOUR HELP AND SUPPORT. PRINCIPAL STRUCK STUDENT TO-DAY HEAVY SHOOTING STICK DRIVING UNWILLING STUDENTS FROM COLLEGE GATES.

*After parading city for two hours students broke up and scattered without bloodshed.*

*Hindu students to meet in C—— Park to-morrow at 9 a.m. hours. Moslem students very undecided. May return College to-morrow and after breaking up of cortège visited house of B—— K——, who advised them to return immediately to College, and send personal apologies to Principal to-night. No Hindu students were in this street and no clash occurred. If Moslem students return College to-morrow position very serious.*

*Two professors of C—— College visited house of*



Mr. R—— T—— *this afternoon, names of same, Professor R—— P—— and S—— B——, Lecturer. Students' reports gathered carefully and sifted by self prove that these professors have been active in organising strike because Principal is alleged to ban Hindu Literary Society play. Professor R—— P—— addressed group of students in city yesterday and before this.*

*Professor S—— B—— sent out his students this morning to start protest meeting against English Principal during lecture hour.*

*Some Hindu students say strike is because Principal struck student with lathi. Moslem students say Principal did not strike any student but pointed out College gate to all students, and that this was after strike had begun.*

*Moslem students say strike is on account of Hindu drinking vessels which Principal alleged to think unsanitary in College Cloister, and that Moslem students were deceived by Hindu students and professors. Moslem students are in angry mood.*

*Police will attend at C—— Park to-morrow, to break up meeting if necessary. Police are posted around College and at all entrances to Principal's bungalow, and will report all callers on Principal.*

*House of Mr. R—— T—— is also under keen observation.*

*Bazaar all quiet. 4 o'clock hours.*

PART FIVE

“B”

*STIRRING THE DUST*



18th November, 1927. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

To-day has been an exciting day. I knew that the College students have been boiling up for mischief from one or two things E. has told me lately; and so I was prepared for some kind of outburst.

Nevertheless I did feel very uneasy when, as I was writing a letter at about a quarter-past nine this morning, I heard a roar of many voices coming from the direction of the College. I couldn't do anything about it, so I finished my letters.

From the moment we landed at Bombay I have been possessed by a feeling of approaching trouble which has never altogether left me. I imagine that certain people among those who live in the vicinity of a volcano which has been quiet for years have just this same sensation before the eruption. I wonder how many English people living in India have really felt ever since they landed this sleeping menace of race hatred: there must surely be many more such people than ever dare to admit these things even to themselves.

The roar from the College did not go on for long,

not for more than about two minutes I suppose, although at the time it seemed to me to last very much longer.

I kept imagining all the things which might have happened, but comforted myself by thinking that had anything happened to E. someone would have had time to send a messenger down to me.

When E. got back at lunch-time he told me that the students were “on strike,” and that he had driven them all down the College drive and shut and locked the main College gate on them, after they had refused to go back to their lecture rooms, where their professors were waiting for them, from the “Upper Lawns” where they had massed.

They have given no reason for their behaviour, but E. believes that their attitude may be due to his having insisted on having bowls of water mixed with permanganate of potash fixed to the wall under the common drinking cups which are attached by chains along the cloisters just below the ewers of water which are daily filled from the separate Hindu well.

These bowls enable anyone who wishes to rinse out and disinfect his cup before drinking and impose no compulsion upon anybody; but I gather that the Hindus very much resent any imputation that any-

thing connected with their food or drink, which is all so ritual to them, is not made physically clean by its sacramental chastity. They dislike what they consider an unwarrantable interference.

E. recognises also that his ban on the play which the Hindu Literary Society were to act this winter is very unpopular. The play they had chosen would undoubtedly have offended the Moslems; and so E., having consulted one or two of the Moslem professors, vetoed it at the meeting which had been called to make the final arrangements for its production.

I am sure he was right to do this, but I can understand how an Indian mind could twist and torture the affair into a magnificent grievance.

I think myself that it may have been a mistake to put the bowls of permanganate of potash in the cloisters, for it is always unwise to interfere with anything connected with religion; but, as E. says, with a Hindu every bestial practice in life has a religious origin and significance, and it must be very difficult for E. to sit down and accept all these unsanitary ways of living without making some effort to change them.

Truly it seems impossible to be a "successful" Principal of an Indian College without losing one's self-respect.

It is all very worrying. One can never know in India which match may kindle the whole bonfire. The Collector, whom E. went to see just before lunch, thinks seriously of the state of affairs, for there has been unrest in the city, too, and here in College it seems to be only the Hindus who profess to have a grievance; and this will probably mean that the Moslems will seize this glorious opportunity to band themselves together to show their loyalty to E. and the British Raj, and by so doing to show their inherent dislike of the Hindus and their ways.

This cleft between College students has so often proved to be the beginning of “Communal riots.”

Since Colleges in India cannot unhappily all be destroyed, which would be the only logical way of securing peace for India in the years to come, it does seem a pity anyway that these “*mixed*” Colleges should not be abolished; and yet perhaps then there would be even worse riots and fighting between rival Colleges.

I am afraid that the Collector will spring a few white hairs during the next week or so.

E. says D—— is most amusing about the whole business, refusing to take it at all seriously. Just as E. is questioning him about the students and their possible grievances, his heavy shoulders will

begin to heave, his eyes to twinkle and for a moment he becomes quite incapable of answering until his spasm of mirth has subsided. But on the whole E. says he is very sensible and much more helpful than the rest of them or than the head clerk, S—— G——, who has "got the wind up" badly, babbling confusedly about the "office secrets" (whatever they may be) and imploring E. to "put a stop to them and blot them out most utterly," apparently so that he may be able to bicycle home peacefully without his fat person being endangered by these "wild, insistent" students.

I have noticed that the sweeper, hitherto one of our best-tempered servants, has been moody and disturbed all day. I have no doubt that some of the students have been trying to upset our Hindu servants. Luckily we have only three, the sweeper and the bhisti, and one punka-coolie whom we have kept as a sort of odd-man now that we no longer need punkas. Our bhisti is half-witted, so that they could not, I suppose, do much with him, and I expect that they have concentrated their energies on the sweeper, for the remaining punka-coolie is a sweet-faced innocent lad and as "odd-man" is, after all, of little consequence to our *ménage*.

I can imagine no more full and complete revenge



for imagined slights than to induce one's sweeper suddenly to quit work without giving one time to produce a substitute; it's like blocking up all a household's drains simultaneously, in hot weather too, by European standards. However, he's not yet left, and it is now eight p.m., and so I'm hoping he may settle down.

I should very much like to know what terrible story of “wicked” injustice by E. is whirling in his poor muddled brain. I must go and have dinner now. . . .

My “munchi”\* came this evening to give me my Hindustani lesson. He usually comes in the morning. I wondered what his views on the strike would be, but like most Indians he has very good manners and did not refer to it at all until I said something about it. “It is no great matter,” he said. “These young students, they are feverish and exciting. It is nothing: their blood will soon be cool again. I daresay that even now they are reflecting on their trivial folly and will come to-morrow back to College full of tears and repentance for their wrong doing.” My lessons usually consist of listening to the munchi's reminiscences

\*Munchi—teacher. The word is common from Port Said to Singapore, particularly applied to a native teacher of Europeans, but never applied in the reverse sense.

and tales of his relations. To-day he told me of a very holy old uncle, who apparently all the time when he is not making pilgrimages to Benares, sits meditating in a little room which he will never allow to be cleaned. He will not have the dust and the dirt stirred lest in so doing any ant or “lesser creature” should be killed. Once he had a clock stolen, and when besought by his relatives to try and recover it and have the thief punished, he replied, “Why should I? He must need it more than I do, or he would not have taken it,” and continued to meditate among the dust.\* I wondered why an Indian saint should think it useful to possess a clock. I should have thought he might well be content to sit motionless in his little room for ever regardless of time, being supplied at intervals with a platter of rice and a gourd of water by one of his disciples, who are always easy enough to acquire in India. Perhaps it was his realisation of the uselessness of a timepiece which made him so philosophical about its disappearance. I did not utter this thought to the munchi. He is evidently immensely proud of this holy relative and went on to-day to tell me how it was that he came to adopt the holy life.

\*For conduct of one European in exactly similar circumstances, see Part VIII, “A.”

It all appears to have happened when he was a young man making his first pilgrimage to Benares. He had been without money or food for several days, and so, feeling weak and discouraged, he determined to drown himself in the sacred river, deeming, I suppose, that no death could better justify a perhaps wasted life. He waded in till the water was up to his neck, when he heard a voice calling him by name to turn back and come out. He obeyed, but when he got to the bank, although he looked everywhere he could see nothing nor any person likely to help him, so he started to wade out again.

Just as the water began to lap against his lips he heard the voice. Again he stumbled back to the bank and again saw nothing, though he “looked keenly in all directions”; so, for the third time, he pushed back bravely into the river, exhausted but determined this time to put an end to it all.

This time as the water was creeping into his ears, so loud and imperative came the voice that he was obliged to struggle up the bank once more.

Just as he emerged from the water some charitable passer-by threw him money, enough to buy food for two or three days. From this he knew that he had been specially chosen for the holy life. I

suppose that his story must have spread very rapidly among the other pilgrims, and thus in a single half-hour his reputation for holiness was firmly established. I gather that from that day to this his begging bowl has always been full.

I don't really know why I am writing all this about the munchi's uncle; but I think it must be to take my mind off the strike. It may simmer on, the strike, I mean, for a week or more and then die down, or it may blaze up into communal riots. Well, we shall see: clearly there is nothing that we can do about it now. Perhaps it would be better if E. were more like the munchi's uncle and forbore to stir the dust. After all, each country knows what it wants and chooses its own saints; and anyway it would avoid much trouble for us both. Still, everyone must act as he thinks best. Yet I think that India slowly and surely teaches most Europeans to act as she thinks best. This is a disheartening thought for any ambitious person. I wonder if that dead spirit of *laissez aller* be the only thing that India allows any of us to take away with us. When she has sapped all our vitality from us she gives us, and we are ready to accept, her dreary philosophy—a Dead Sea fruit.

My instinctive revulsion from life in India has

been intensified lately. Sometimes I feel that I really must pull myself together and seriously consider some of the compensations for living in India.

Well, there is the service. We are only two people and our staff numbers, has to number, thirteen servants (even in winter and more in the hot weather). “How delightful!” I suppose people at home may think. “No need to do anything for yourself!” Well, as a matter of fact, in the hot weather I suppose one doesn’t want to do anything for oneself, but surely that is not an advantage, and it makes the servants a necessity; but even so, each man has his appointed task and is obliged by the rules of his caste to keep strictly to it. There is the sweeper: he fulfils the function of a drain, but in Europe there *is* the drain, quicker, more efficient, more obliging than the best sweeper, and we do not count it as a servant. Then there is the bhisti: he fulfils the function of a tap, but in Europe there *is* the tap, ever ready with its supply of water, quicker, more efficient, more obliging than the most picturesque bhisti, with little round Hindu cap and taut skin of water under his arm. Then there are the punka-coolies (we had three in the hot weather): they fulfil the function of fans; but how much better are our electric fans, which do not flag nor stop

when they are tired as these poor drowsy youths sometimes do. No, one has to have all these servants to make life in India at all tolerable. We would all rather have our drains, taps and electric fans, all those things which ensure more privacy by eliminating the human element. (I see my “compensation” has turned into an affliction after all.)

Well, there is the Club. How often in England have I heard Anglo-Indians speaking affectionately or boastingly of their clubs in India. We, in C——, are considered particularly lucky in our club; and indeed it is a fine, solid, spacious building, pleasant from within and from without, with pleasant-looking people congregating in it every day and nearly all day.

But while it enormously reduces private hospitality where some intellectual life might flourish, I cannot believe that it provides any intellectual life itself. The whole atmosphere of the place is necessarily casual. Its very *bonhomie* precludes selectiveness, unless a certain social snobbishness, and militates against deliberate and thoughtful entertainment, where wit and culture and philosophy may be more important than food, drink and gossip. Surely the Club is a social amenity which approximates to the inn, and surely the habitu   of an inn

may indeed become a good raconteur; but is he not apt to content himself with that and to tell his stories over and over again to succeeding travellers? At its worst, I suppose, the Club approximates to a bar. No, it seems to me that this boasted compensation, too, is another makeshift convenience which is maintained largely by the sense of impermanence which forms the background of the life of almost every Englishman in India. Almost everything which we have imported into this country is makeshift, because we feel that it will be good enough for to-day, for to-morrow we shall retire.

No community in the world is so persistently buoyed up by the thought of its retirement as the European community in India; and because the average Englishman has spent his life dreaming of, but not preparing for, the intimate private self-examination of retirement, how pitiable a show he makes at the end at Bath or Cheltenham. No, no. Club life too is an affliction. But this is ridiculous! I am only succeeding in listing my afflictions.

But where are the compensations? It is easy enough to list afflictions. E.'s job is an affliction, for it is true that English Principals of Indian Colleges are more often murdered than any other civil administrators in the world, for, of course, they

have to do solely with wholly irresponsible and excitable youths and must themselves be always unarmed.

Perhaps, after all, E. is right to concentrate upon the sanitary improvements, for it may well be the insanitary conditions, the improper nourishment, the fanatical disregard for health—if health anywhere impinge upon religious prejudice—which produces the nervously deranged and hysterical young man of India. This is an interesting thought, for do we not all know that a young Indian in England is an infinitely better balanced and more reasonable and restrained member of Society or guest of Society than that same Indian will be when he returns to his own country, to its dirt and its privations and its cruel superstitions?

Yet there must be, there are, compensations for life here. To be in the same country as Agra, Benares, Delhi, all the other wonderful Indian cities, surely that may be a compensation great enough to set against the hundred disadvantages of the actual life here? It may be for oneself and for one's husband, but not for any child likely to be born here. The few European children I have seen here have shocked me. Without vitality or colour, worn and precocious, they seem to be little old



men and women. I shall never forget being taken by Mrs. K—— to see her little boy Roger, aged about two, asleep in bed.

His skin and hair were the colour of a tallow candle; he was thin and weedy, and his face and neck were blotched with big, angry mosquito bites.

A child asleep should be, and usually is, a very lovely sight. Poor little Roger was almost repulsive, and yet his mother told me that he was “very well.” Added to the health difficulties of the climate itself, there is always the danger of the ayah—in order to induce sleep or to stop whining or crying, teaching the child that unhappy habit so draining to the nervous system and of which many children never rid themselves. I believe that almost all ayahs take this to be a part of their ordinary nursery duties, and they are particularly apt to inculcate the habit in baby girls. No, India is the last place in which one would wish to bring up a child even for a few months.

I know of one preparatory school in England where the parents or guardian of a candidate for admission are required to fill up a form declaring that if the child was born in India it was removed before it was two years old. It seems hard; but I cannot help wishing that more of our schools had this strict rule, for it is easy to imagine how danger-

ous an Anglo-Indian child might be in a school; and if, in this way, more parents had their attention called to the dangers of infancy in India, many, many more mothers would have their minds made up for them, and would either take their children home or would leave them or send them to grandmothers or aunts in England, and much nervous suffering in after-life might be avoided.

My thoughts to-night seem to drift round in a vague sad way: the truth is, of course, that there is nothing in Indian life which is a true compensation for me or for Edward. Yet there are thousands of English people who revel in life here. There is Mrs. M——, for example, the Commissioner's wife: the sense of importance and power which she gets from her husband's position is the very breath of life to her. The number of servants at whom she may bark her orders, the number of elephants which by virtue of his position her husband is able to command for a shooting trip (despite the fact that many other people of lesser importance may want them too), the fact that when she sweeps into the Club in her leopard-skin coat, she is almost certain to be the most important woman there—all these things and many others must be ample compensation for her.

The English, home-grown equivalent of Mrs. M—— enjoys none of these distinctions. She is only one of several thousand other women of just the same social standing, she has in England probably rather less money and no opportunities of appearing greater or grander than her neighbours.

Well, Mrs. M—— has her India; and India has her Mrs. M——s.

Then I suppose that the average English army officers, especially the young ones, enjoy their time in India more than any other period of their life. Polo, pig-sticking, shooting, games and dancing; how many times have I heard soldiers expatiating on the glories of India!

And assistant collectors and young police superintendents, they too seem to find it all one long round of enjoyment, varied, of course, by hours of hard work, which are, after all, essential, particularly for the rather thoughtless, in order that they may appreciate their playtime the more; but far, far the greater number of these young men do, in fact, grow up very quickly to give their best to India when they come to realise how sad a country India really is.

The K——s\* drove round to see us for a short

\*Mr. K—— was, to the best of my recollection, a forestry officer.

time after dinner to-night; rather funny, as I had just been writing about them. It was nice of them, since we do not know them at all well.

She looks terribly ill, bright yellow, and her hair and eyes dead and lack-lustre. She is a prey to malaria, she tells me, and in order to stave off the attacks she has always to take I forget how many grains of quinine a day, and of course it upsets her and makes her very deaf. She feels that she ought to go home and take Roger with her, but she hates the thought of leaving her husband.

It is a difficult question for a woman to decide; whatever step she decides to take will as likely as not seem to have been the wrong one in ten years' time. I do hope that I shall never have to make the decision.

Usually, of course, children are not sent home until they are about five, and Roger is only two and a half, but from what she said this evening I gathered that she quite realised that he is not as healthy as he ought to be, even in India, and that if she wants him to start life without a handicap, she must get him away to a better climate at once. He was born in England, but she brought him out here when he was three months old. He has had an exciting life, for, the first time they took him out to camp, when

he was six months old, he was placed in an old soap-box, by way of a cradle, which was then strapped on to the back of an elephant. The elephant, a young one, took fright and bolted—with Roger, his mother and the mahout. Luckily the mahout was able to regain control of it before any damage was done.

This soap-box served him well for two seasons, but he was now outgrown it; and Mrs. K—— is wondering what sort of receptacle shall hold him for the coming camping-out season.

Going out to camp must be great fun. I wish we could do it. Everyone here seems to spend Christmas in camp. All the women seem to love it: most of them shoot a bit. The scenery must be wonderful and camp life so peaceful after the worry and fidget of a Principal's life.

I wonder if we shall ever do it. E. will not kill anything for “sport” on principle, and I don't really know what else there would be to do but shoot, unless one had enormously expensive photographic apparatus; so it seems unlikely that we shall ever go.

The K——s quite cheered us up. I wish they could have stayed longer, but Mrs. K—— doesn't like leaving Roger for very long. She has a bearer to look after him now, a servant they had for some

time before he was born. She says ayahs are too much of a gamble. You *may* get a treasure, but it is most unlikely. On the whole a bearer who has been proved trustworthy is better if you have a son. I couldn't help urging her strongly to go home for a few months, and if possible to try to leave Roger with some kind relation in England when she came out again; but I don't suppose that she will do this. Very few parents are really unselfish.

*19th November, 1927.* (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

The strike goes on. The Moslems came back in a body this morning with garlands, ready to acclaim E. as a hero. We suppose that as E. is alleged to have annoyed and "insulted" the Hindus, he may easily become a champion of the Moslems. Anyhow, it is most embarrassing for E., and very nerve-racking for all those in authority here in C——. The wind seems to be fanning the sparks red hot all ready to kindle the bonfire.

Mr. D—— came in with E. this morning for a few minutes just before lunch, but he would not stay for lunch. A strike seems to suit him admirably. The whole thing might be a comic opera specially staged for his pleasure. He has great difficulty in

referring to it without shaking with laughter; and as he feels he has to curb his amusement out of respect for E., his sense of humour and his natural courtesy are having a tremendous struggle, which is most entertaining to watch.

“It is a pity you did not see Mr. Charles driving those students in a flock to the main gates,” he said to me, solemnly and even regretfully, as if I had missed for ever a really fine performance. “They were noisy and riotous, yet they went as one man.” The thought of them going “as one man” appeared to be almost too much for him. His shoulders had just begun to heave and quiver in what looked like an almost painful noiseless laughter, when E. asked him a question, and the struggle back to the serious was fascinating to watch.

“Do you think they will come back soon?” I asked a little later on. “I do not know,” he said. “Many students blow hot and cold in one breath and some are young and lively. I daresay they will stay away a week or more. It does not matter much. When they come back I daresay they will be most quiet and diligent and will weep many tears, and they will work well and earnestly at their books.”

I admire his philosophical attitude very much, and I think that his easy and tranquil acceptance of the

situation is a great help to E.

It must be maddening, I gather from what E. says, to have people like the clerk, S—— G——, dithering about at times like this.

I started the bearer looking for scorpions to-day. One has to have a periodical search for them even in the cold weather, and we haven't had a scorpion hunt for three weeks. Beastly little things! They get behind pictures, in shoes and in any odd corner. Their sting is fearful, agonisingly painful and sometimes fatal. I don't think that there is any antidote with which one can be injected after one has been stung by a scorpion; but I suppose that such an antidote will eventually be discovered. I wonder why Nature should give to such a little beast such a seemingly disproportionate power of life and death, since it cannot eat the carcase of a man when it has killed one.

Bearer found two, one behind *Pope Leo IX* and one just inside the turned-up edge of the matting in our bedroom, where it is a few inches too wide for the room. He killed them both extraordinarily quickly with a stick, dealing them savage, unerring blows in a strangely animal way.

Scorpions are odd-looking creatures, with their little dark plated tails lifted up in that pert yet



menacing way. Yet I suppose that they are not aggressive and that, if left alone, they do not attack human beings.

I am so glad that we have no dog here, for I don't see how one could be sure of his always avoiding scorpions; and once stung he would soon die, for animals have no real powers of resistance. This is a merciful dispensation of Nature, which we seem to have rejected, for it is only our resistance of death which makes death horrible; and our resistance comes from all this useless rationalisation around the simple fact of death.

We cannot let things be: we must be for ever stirring the dust, even the dust of death.

PART SIX

“A”

*PROFESSOR P—— WRITES  
PROSE*



21st November, 1927.

Received attached letter from bearer's hands while in my bath yesterday morning. I refused to read the letter till I was dry: we English are an obstinate people.

Sir,—

*Your cruel words yesterday came to me as a bolt from the blue.*

*How can I ever say to you how utterly I am innocent of all the wickedness and base plotting and scheming of which you ruthlessly charge me?*

*Never, never have I stirred up strife and sedition and plotted against discipline and order in the College of my every fair hope and dream, where my life is coming to fullness and birth like an opening flower in the beauteous stillness of dignified academic life, under your fine leadership and with your great, calm scholarship and ripe learning to guide my barque into the still waters of philosophy and good literature.*

*I know not, Mr. Principal, I know not what you say. Base men have been at your ears, whispering jealousies and prevarications and rustling the words of intrigue and low*

*cunning and blowing hot and cold upon the clear pool of your judgment, as evil clouds and storms trouble the still waters of a mountain lake.*

*Never have I taken part in any activity or meeting or protest against your good self or your discipline as wise Principal and head of this great academic body corporate.*

*Never did I address students in the city to encourage strike. I know nothing of any of these things. I know not the words of the cruel report which you read aloud in ringing tones.*

*The echoes of your voice and of your harsh cry to me to stand and to leave the room and leave my dear and well-beloved College and my fair College haunts are ringing still in my stifled ears as thunder rings in a mountain valley above a running brook.*

*But all these things, how can I say them in a little letter, when my heart is full?*

*How shall I make myself clear to you, for my heart is clear as crystal and without a flaw?*

*Will you not, dear sir, you, who are renowned far and wide for your kindness and gentleness and the fairness of your way, will you not have pity upon me and allow me to speak with you?*

*I can make clear to you my every intention and each and every act which I have performed, if you will but in*

*common justice allow me to plead before you in the calm, private stillness of your study, lined as we all know with well-worn books, hung with your gorgeous pictures of your beloved medieval times,\* the study of a man of thought and letters. There I can explain all and be guiltless and innocent before you without lies or cunning or prevarication.*

*In the cruel meeting, where your voice struck and echoed as hammer-blows upon my innocent and battered head, I could say nothing, for you forbade me to speak, and ordered me as a low-down slave from the room as though unworthy to look upon your countenance.*

*This was not just, dear Mr. Principal, so to expel me without hearing me, reading aloud the words of a base and lying report, prepared perhaps by base spies and paid among the Moslem police.*

*Mr. Principal, sir, I bear no malice, hatred or bitterness within my heart for this cruel injustice, but if I may only speak with you to explain all things, then will justice be done and you will restore me to my place and I will ever serve you well and faithfully, for I am guiltless of everything which is alleged against me.*

*Yesterday you were angry so that your words were as*

\*Professor P—— had been to my room on a previous occasion and had apparently noted the furniture. The "gorgeous pictures" hung in my study were six "Medici Prints." I am glad to think my books are "well-worn."

*cruel thrusts; but to-day I can explain all and I shall flourish again in your smile, if you will but allow me the common justice of any criminal dog to speak to you, to answer every charge brought against me.*

*Now I bring, therefore, this letter to you in full hope and certain confidence and in all proper respect, Mr. Principal; and while you read it, behold I am waiting at the gate.*

*And so I remain now and always*

*Your most humble and obedient servant,*

R—— P—— (*once your favourite*).

Well, my instinct, of course, was to leave him at the gate, but I had some fear of a crowd collecting. The Moslem students were arriving for their lectures as they did yesterday, and a crowd of Hindu supporters of Professor P—— might, I thought, start trouble with them.

I sent bearer down to fetch Professor P—— and show him into the drawing-room while I dressed.

Bearer came back and I took a long time to dress. I felt that I had got P—— inside and that the longer he stayed and the fewer words spoken the better.

When I got back into the bedroom from my dressing-room Mary wanted to know what it was all about and we decided not to postpone breakfast.

Bearer was to come in and tell me after five minutes that breakfast was ready. Despite this, my conversation with P—— lasted half an hour or more. I can't remember much that I said. P—— made some magnificent remarks; but they are not worth recording. This note-book isn't the libretto of a comic opera, or is it?

P—— left the bungalow in tears, his shoulders shaking, his handkerchief fluttering round his face in the breeze. I watched his exit from the verandah: at the bottom of the drive there appeared to be no crowd: I saw P—— climb slowly into a tonga, apparently still weeping, and I watched the tonga drive slowly away.

I simply don't believe one word that P—— said to me; I don't believe that he even expected me to believe them; they were uttered to satisfy his dramatic instinct, the dramatic instinct of the under-dog, who, since he must be for ever “squashed,” will make a Roman holiday out of each “squashing.” And, anyway, his talk to me was enough to wring out those splendid tears.

I shall resign from this as soon as this strike is over, unless I can get R—— and R—— T—— removed from the board; and perhaps even then. It's dirty work touching an Indian College. A



“wog” with a university degree is necessarily spiritually perverted. To a “wog” a knowledge of English, a knowledge of the drama, a familiarity with the abstractions of mathematics, are all means to the end, which is deception.

Life to a “wog” is dull: it is inevitable, it is thrust upon him from without and from above: he is nothing in life because he has not created life: but he remains an artist and must create his *milieu* to express and to create himself; therefore he studies the drama and mathematics and shoots himself as X through the cube root of N and comes out into eternity as a pale, falling star.

I haven’t written in this book since the first day of the strike. Well, there’s been nothing to write about. We don’t go out: Mary doesn’t like to: there’s an armed guard outside. We asked for one yesterday, after the Collector’s midnight visit; but I don’t believe that he saw the connection.

The day before yesterday he appeared at midnight in an old Ford, and blew his horn.

I went myself on to the verandah to let him in, despite the shrieks of the chokhidar. He had come to collect the original police report because he elected to say that in reading from it to the meeting of Senior Common Room, during which I sacked

the two professors, I had endangered the life of the policeman who had written it; but as I neither did nor could read his name and only read aloud short extracts from the report, I find that hard to believe; but of course I probably did wrong to sack P—— and B—— at all, for the police are almost entirely Moslem, and though I believe the report to have been an exact and honest statement, it is true that to have used it may lead to communal hatred.

Luckily for me I had locked the report in the College safe and couldn't therefore hand it back to R—— at his fantastic midnight visit. When he had gone I dressed and went up to College and got out the report and copied it myself on my little Underwood.

I wouldn't be without a copy of that report for five years' salary.

If I have trouble with the Senate or with my own board I shall use that report again, and damn the consequences. I told R—— so yesterday when I took him back the original. He couldn't refuse to see the justification which I might have for defending my own conduct on valid police evidence, which in the first place I had come by legitimately; but he hated the thought that I had had time to copy the report, and I could see that he was cursing himself for not having ordered me in the name of the King

or of fiddle-de-dee to fetch it for him then and there when he called for it. Poor man, he's tired, but now he hates me, and that's probably a pity: we can't afford mutual hatred in India.

When, the day before yesterday, the Moslems came back to College, there was an awkward moment or two, for they had brought “garlands”\*, and on my way up to my office I nearly had to “strike” several of my students to keep the garlands from my neck.

It was bad form in them and alarming for me, for on the lawn before my office were half a dozen Hindu Professors.

In my office, when I reached it, was a Moslem deputation of seven third-year students with a framed apology, typewritten and surrounded by red, painted flowers, like ill-drawn convolvuli, in a cheap wooden frame and behind rather befingered glass. Grotesque, perhaps, but such is man's sense of pity and so oddly mixed with his habit of computing the purchase price of favours, that the little offering was strangely touching, and when I had taken it I put it on my desk and looked hastily elsewhere.

\*“Garlands”—tinsel and flower chains which Indian convention throws around the neck of every momentary hero.

S—— G—— had been so terrified, he told me, of these seven students, themselves dedecked with flowers by their less bold comrades, that he had let them into my office before I arrived.

When I first came in and showed some surprise and perhaps displeasure at finding them there, they shuffled about and in a sudden access of politeness and mutual affection to obtain mutual support, each boy decided that he wanted to stand next to every other boy and they started to gyrate in a couple of concentric circles, spinning in opposite directions, and hissing with humility.

The Moslems are much more often good-looking than the Hindus; and this deputation was of bonny-faced people, who looked somehow, seen separately like this, younger, healthier, more manly than their wizened twenty-year-old coevals of the ageless Hindu creed.

I suspect that old B—— K—— had told these students what to say to me, and they had obviously learnt some sort of speech by heart.

I let it rip for a minute or two and then I dismissed them to their lectures and spent the whole of the morning, after sacking R—— P—— and S—— B——, going from lecture room to lecture room to make sure that my Moslem students were not

being rude to the Hindu professors, nor, indeed, the professors to them.

I dodged backwards and forwards and must have exasperated everybody; but I don't much care. Have I not been exasperated myself?

I have to-day issued the notices convening an extraordinary meeting of the Committee of Management for the day after to-morrow.

Why should I carry this burden alone? R—— and R—— T—— have engineered this strike. They shall now engineer the ending of it or carry the burden of its going on.

I shall write notes for my speech to-morrow and read my report of the strike, and there shall be no uncertainty. Perhaps it is a pity that the local press, which is so fond of College news and gossip, will never carry a copy of my report.

Our guard irritates me exceedingly. They look so silly . . . red turbans, khaki shorts, bare knees, bare feet and puttees wound in between like jettisoned springs serving no useful purpose.

The padding irregular tread of the sentry on duty disturbs my thoughts, and even without this irritating noise my thoughts are held by nothing.

This “strike” is nothing. It is all fluid. There is no reason and no purpose for it. The very beginning

of the “strike” offers no resistance to the dissecting knife of thought; and what offers no resistance offers no prize or purchase.

It is impossible to bend out the Indian mind into a straight line because its curves and sinuosities are like the slipping eddies of water in a quick stream.

Indian thought does not resist or comprehend circumstance, it is made by circumstance and is as shifting as the shades of dawn, noon and twilight; and so it is not possible to resist or comprehend Indian thought.

There are no such things as Indian will or Indian purpose or Indian directive. What a European imagines to be the will of India is only what that European can remember of the circumstances of yesterday or see of the circumstances of to-day; just as a man’s “knowledge” of a stream is no more than his remembrance of, or the range of his vision over, the banks between which it flows.

Well, the day after to-morrow, it shall flow into the whirlpool of my committee meeting and, by God, they shall learn the meaning of their best metaphor, “Tight Water.”



PART SIX

“B”

*RETREAT*





24<sup>th</sup> November, 1927. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

The strike is over: to-day the Hindus came back, with about a dozen absentees.

Yesterday afternoon there was the meeting of the Managing Committee and to-day it is all over from more points of view than one.

I did not write in my diary yesterday, for the time when I generally write was taken up "putting on our gew-gaws," as E. calls it, to go to the Club dance.

Before the dance we dined with the R——s, and R—— had presided at the meeting of the Committee in the afternoon.

E. only got back from the meeting just in time to get dressed, and while he did this he told me about it all.

Well, I suppose it means we shall be leaving India soon. R—— T—— attended the meeting, but R——\* was not so brave, and had other business elsewhere.

Yes, I suppose we shall be leaving India: I don't

\* The "black one," not the Collector.—M.C. (1933.)

believe that I shall ever come to regret to-day: it seems certain that this is the end, for the Governing Body, even now that the real Commissioner, Mr. M——, C.I.E., is back to preside at the meeting, will never be able, will never dare to accept the only conditions on which E. has expressed himself as willing to stay, i.e., (1) that R—— T——, who is publicly known to have fostered the strike, either himself resign from both Governing Body and Managing Committee or be removed from the bodies; (2) that E. become henceforth an *ex officio* member of the Governing Body; and (3) that his salary be very considerably raised, since he considers that in all the circumstances it is impossible for him to have his wife with him where such occurrences as the strike are likely to recur, and since he will therefore have to support two establishments.

Perhaps I should have gone home, for a bit anyway; but the last condition is in reality nothing but a sop to their pride, for they can accept his resignation now, simply saying that they have no money; and they can dismiss the first two conditions from their troubled minds.

As a matter of fact it will cost them a pretty penny to send us home and find a new Principal and bring

him out here; and they must send us home, for they have obviously broken every sort of contract expressed or implied, when members of the Governing Body which employs E. publicly foment a strike against him.

Well, I shall not have one single regret at leaving India. E. will not have many, I think, apart from the fact that his resignation may look like running away. Well, let it! This country is bad for the health, the character, for everything; and, anyway, I am determined that no child of mine shall be born in it.

However, in order to see at close quarters five hundred Europeans in India gathered together in one place, it is clearly necessary to be a European in India. Perhaps that is worth while.

When, therefore, we'd put on our “gew-gaws,” we set off in a tonga and arrived at the Collector's house almost at the appointed hour.

R—— was in strangely good form: I couldn't help liking him: he never reminded us by word or implication of the meeting from which he and E. had just come.

Then to the dance. It was a fancy-dress ball and most people conscientiously had put on something other than their ordinary evening clothes. As is

usual at that sort of gathering, there were very few who were worth noticing. The best-looking woman was probably young Mrs. L——, who wore some sort of Turkish dress. She was only married about six months ago, and has been out here for only four months. She does not seem to be very popular with the ladies here. Perhaps because of her rather *gauche* schoolgirlish manners she assumes she may be permitted to know Mrs. X—— one day and cut her the next if she thinks that she happens to be with someone a little more important or amusing; and it puts people's backs up. She behaves in this way because she has a wholly wrong idea of the value of regular features and a good complexion or of their uses, or, since she has brought them to India, of their preservation.

But perhaps the ladies of C—— dislike her because all the men cluster round her the moment she appears. Anyway, she seemed to be enjoying herself last night. Most people did, for that matter.

Mr. M——, back from leave, was in great form. I heard some of his heavily sarcastic remarks uttered slowly, always during pauses in the general buzz of conversation. His face was glued for the evening into a rather sneering smile, which I feel sure means that he is really enjoying himself, seeing the world

make a fool of itself. He has the reputation, I believe, of being one of the rudest men in India. We have never found him so: personally I rather like him, and E. has more respect for him than for most men we have met out here. He is not at all stupid and has a good dry sense of humour, tinged with cruelty, I daresay. He is known to be very good at “managing the wogs.” I suspect that his “management” consists in ordering them quite brutally to do as he thinks fit, and since it never enters his head that any of them could possibly dream of questioning his decisions, it never enters their heads either; and they are all happy. Very probably this old-fashioned way is the soundest for conducting business in India.

But, right or wrong, it will not do for long, for all the young European civil servants starting work in India are taught such very, very different methods. They learn consideration, tact, broadmindedness, almost as so many academic subjects nowadays. Sometimes they do well with their consideration, tact and broadmindedness, and sometimes it fails; but if it fails under the new régime it is always they who are to blame. Surely that can’t always be just: there have been magnificent administrators who have never heard of consideration, tact and broad-

mindfulness; and, anyway, you can't teach these things out of a book.

But perhaps some change from Mr. M——'s way is necessary, but only because of our own educational policy in India. Anyway, Mr. M—— has the reputation for being as popular with Indians as he is unpopular with his own countrymen. I can perfectly understand why the Indians like him, for amidst so much shifting, shapeless sand he is a firm rock to which to cling, sharp and uncomfortable as it may be.

He is a “strong man”; but how should he dare to be less with Mrs. M—— for a wife? She is as determined and as worldly as *Mrs. Proudie* of *Barchester Towers*, though perhaps kinder-hearted.

Left to himself I believe that Mr. M—— might jog along very comfortably. I can't believe that he is particularly ambitious, for he isn't at all stupid: he just will not take the trouble to be polite to people, seemingly least of all the people who might, one would have thought, be of use to him. We are always being told how he has offended Governors by his off-hand manner.

Mrs. M—— is a very different kettle of fish. I dislike her intensely; officious, managing, devoid of any imagination and capable only in that awful

bustling way which annoys and worries everyone with whom she is working. She is of the type of women I have always most disliked; yet she is, and is recognised as being, a "splendid" Commissioner's wife and mother (her children are not Commissioners yet, but they will be if India lasts long enough).

Last night at the dance she was here, there and everywhere, looking like old Mother Goose, in a kind of quilted mauve satin dress and a little lace cap. She told us she was wearing "the very same dress, don't you know, that was worn by my ancestress, Lady Lettice Thingunme, two hundred years ago."

It was very ugly and the colour was particularly unbecoming below her full, yellow face. She started the evening with a little rouge; but in the heat it soon wore off; she was so busy ordering everybody about, introducing and re-introducing, seeing if there were places for supper for her particular friends, and so on, that she forgot to put on any more.

Her lace cap, too, got more and more rakish, and there was no one there who dared to tell her to put it straight.

Much later in the evening someone, brushing against her while dancing, carried it off on his



epaulette. Shrieking to him to stop, she left her partner and pursued the lace cap which was floating gaily on the shoulder of the unconscious despoiler. Quite good-temperedly, for it was after supper, she snatched it back again.

“‘‘Lucky the wig wasn’t in it!’’ said a voice in my ear. It was Colonel H——, who, with Mrs. H——, is staying in C—— for a few days.

“‘‘That woman ’ll be the death of me,’’ he went on, mopping his forehead and the back of his neck. “‘‘God, I’ve had to dance with her twice this evening, and it’s like going round with a kangaroo. Hop, hop, hop, and then a dash into a corner to introduce some dear friend to another; and usually they’ve known each other for years. She’s a bit excited to-night, though,’’ he went on. “‘‘Told me two people had tried to kiss her under the mistletoe. I pretended not to hear. I knew she’d feel a bit silly to-morrow if she thought I’d taken any notice of what she said. She’s not a bad sort, though: her bark’s much worse than her bite. Don’t you ever be frightened of her, Mrs. Charles: just stand up to her and take no nonsense from her, and she’ll like you all the better for it. She’s a good sportsman, and she ought to be more popular than she is. She’s as kind as she can be if anyone’s in trouble.’’

Well, she may be, but I very much hope I shall never have to accept sympathy or consolation from her; and why should I now, now that we are free? Oh, I take it for granted that we are free one moment and then the next I wonder and fear. Supposing that the board did accept E.'s terms, then I might be at the mercy of the pity of Mrs. M——, like the rest of us.

I do so much prefer Mr. M—— and his outspoken comments, and he does comment quite freely on one's appearance or on anything else which may happen to strike him, to her uncanny way of making seemingly innocent remarks which leave one feeling vaguely uncomfortable.

Well, good luck to her, anyway. She's one of the stoutest props of the British Raj in Central India.

The Club looked charming. Tubs of flowers and flowering shrubs everywhere. All the sitting-out places very well and comfortably arranged and the service, food and drink excellent.

E. was wearing his Japanese dress, which looked very well and striking in its sombre dignity, among the other mostly rather flashy fancy dresses. I wish I had taken the opportunity to tell Mrs. M—— that each article of his dress was given him by some member of the Japanese Imperial family. Not that

she'd have thought much of that. “Japs, indeed! What funny little people they are!” I daresay she hardly knows where Japan is.

Well, it was great fun. There were very few girls out from England eager to secure tickets in the great marriage lottery, so the standard of looks was not very high. I do wish English women in India *would* do (and I'm sure it's *would* and not *could*) something about their complexions. A little rouge and lip-stick would do wonders on top of a layer of good vanishing cream, and I should like to add an eye-bath of euphrasia and a tonic for the hair. Quite young and potentially pretty women seem to let themselves go in the most hopeless way. That's why I find French women so admirable . . . however ugly they are, they never give up hope. Indeed, the fact of their being plain seems to spur them on to greater efforts. That is what “chic” means, and I find it a much more attractive thing than mere lazy good looks.

I was sorry that Mrs. R—— wore a black pierrette dress with, of course, no make-up. Why black against a yellow skin when there are many colours which would have looked so well—bronze or copper, or a dull olive green, all of which would have agreed with her skin instead of so rudely

contradicting it? She is such a charming person: it seems a pity that she should have so little idea of clothing herself. Does she think it wrong, now that she's the mother of two children, to consider dress; or is it simply that she can't be bothered? Perhaps her husband never notices what she's wearing and that may discourage her. He was clad as a court jester in blue and red. She had made his dress most cleverly; I thought it one of the best there, apart from the one or two beautiful authentic ones; but he is one of those unfortunate men, not fat, but whose body is somehow just not properly controlled, so that it always seems to bulge out about half an inch too much in the wrong places. His clothes never sit on him quite comfortably, but seem to share in his general uneasiness. He is a nice man, but lacks that unobtrusive self-assurance which would be so valuable to him if he wants to “get on,” as I suppose he does.

Oh, these club and regimental dances in India! How like they are to hunt balls at home. Except for the dark-skinned servants moving about, one could hardly say with certainty that one was not in England in a rather silly set: the people have travelled a long way, but they say very much the same things and with no sense of repetition.

All the same, I enjoyed this dance very much; but all the time my thoughts would keep going back to the Managing Committee meeting and trying to imagine what they must all look like, these Indians sitting round a table and putting their hands on it and talking. Behind this again there was the thought of E.'s threatened resignation, which I take to be a *fait accompli* now.

Is it victory, defeat or retreat?

Perhaps hardly victory, for though E. has won completely over the strike (the ringleaders have been cringing, grovelling and weeping profusely most of the morning, imploring forgiveness in the wildest and most abject way), yet to follow up over and consolidate the ground won it would be necessary for E. to stay on.

Yet no one could call it defeat, so it must be retreat. Perhaps E. has won, but he has been so disgusted by the very people he has perhaps defeated and sees so clearly the uselessness of so-called higher education in India that his victory is entirely barren for him.

Perhaps the Indians may be justified in thinking later on, when his resignation becomes known, that they have won the battle.

Had we stayed there is no doubt that our position

here would only have been enormously strengthened by this strike. True, R—— T—— would not have been removed from the Governing Body, but, as a matter of fact, his activities would have been much easier to curb within than without the College group and he would anyway have lain low for some time. That he could ever keep out of mischief for very long is unthinkable to anyone who knows him or his record. His stubby black finger is ever poised ready to be poked into some unlucky pie, be it Indian or European.

I have no doubt that he will consider that E.'s resignation is an acknowledged victory for himself. So indeed it will be, for he will be there still and we shall have gone, yet I fancy he will have to pay for it, for there is no doubt that he is heartily detested by most of the decent Hindus as well as by the Moslems, of course.

I am afraid that the Moslems will feel that E. is deserting them. He likes most of them: it is a pity, but we must look at the future.

India is heading—or ought I to say drifting?—towards self-government. God knows what chaos and bloodshed will precede and follow the day when we shall drop the reins of government, but that that day will come, and fairly soon, I am convinced.

If we so much as intended to keep peace in this land, it would be necessary that we should send here the strong men, the men like Mr. M——, and send out our young “civilians” to be trained under the Mr. M——s; but for years now that has not been our practice. We are filling the service with men trained quite differently and trained so thoroughly that, for the most part, they really think quite differently. As a matter of fact, too, the truth is—but people will never seem ready to admit this—that we are no longer recruiting from the same social class. I wonder why? Perhaps because the young men of the class which used to come out and govern India would inevitably have inherited and acquired from their earliest youth the “prejudices,” if such they were, of their fathers and their fathers’ fathers, and so to change the quality of government it has been necessary to change the quality of the governors.

No, I feel that when we go we shall be giving up nothing that either of us values. But are we avoiding responsibility? I suppose we are. At any rate, we shall be showing a certain moral courage, for this decision of ours to be quit of the country will be most unpopular with all the Europeans directly concerned with the College, with all the

better Indians and with every Moslem, and, of course, with all E.'s and my relations, who were naturally delighted with his appointment to such a post while still a young man.

Well, we must avoid thinking too much about the unpopularity of our move during the time in India which yet remains to us. We shall be like escaping prisoners, and we must try not to feel too guilty about all the prisoners we are leaving behind, all those other Europeans who will be going on faithfully slaving away at that thankless task. Most of them, however, by virtue of their having been some time in this country, have had, like prisoners serving a long time sentence, certain privileges accorded them: they have grown accustomed to the climate, they have learnt to enjoy out of all proportion to their real value their camping, their polo, their shooting, and most of them succeed in convincing themselves that, in their own language, "life in India isn't so bad after all."

Perhaps it isn't, really. Perhaps I have only been able to feel its disadvantages and have not recognised its compensations; but Heaven forbid that either I or E. should ever come to regard the "Club" or polo or pig-sticking as a compensation! Obviously there are many infinitely better things in India



than these; but sadly enough the better things are almost all purely Indian, which is natural, of course, for indigenous vegetation generally does flourish better than the imported plant. Yet I say “sadly enough,” for it is not easy to be an administrator here representing the British Raj and find your consolation in the wisdom of the Vedas, in the philosophy of yoga.

How I pity all these unfortunate men, women and children, especially the children, whom we shall leave behind.

Until yesterday I felt so lost in this vast country, so inferior to these tired, liverish, hard-working civil servants, so much less useful than their worn, lifeless but good and capable wives. From now on I shall be buoyed up by a wonderful feeling of independence. I hope I shall be able to control my feelings of pleasure within decent bounds. To show my happiness would look too much like crowing over the people who are forced to stay on here. Poor things, they would, nearly all of them, I know, give anything to be in our place, even going home as we are with very little money and no job.

Perhaps, now that I know that we are bound to be leaving soon, I shall be able to discover all the good things in life here. I do hope so. It would be

such a change and I don't like to be forced to look at anything, much less a vast continent, and see it all dark.

I shall not miss our servants, *qua* servants, but I shall leave them, most of them, with a certain feeling of regret—the tiny, anxious bearer, who every time I see him reminds me of a timid but industrious mouse with his gentle young wife, for ever cooped up in her courtyard, and his chubby little boy who has got much bolder of late and will sometimes accept a sweet from me, though always without a smile; then the straight, black-eyed cook I shall miss too: he makes rather a fine picture every day as he comes in for orders. Some people appear to be so much more alive than others and usually these are particularly restrained, almost curbed, in their movements, as though they realised that they possessed a slumbering force and were taking care to control it: our cook is one of these people.

Then the sweeper, a delightful servant; he has a nice, almost European face except for the colour of his skin, which is particularly dark. I have often noticed that among the “untouchables” with whom the skin is apt to be very dark, almost black, the features and the eyes are almost European. This is so with our under-sweeper, too, who used to be one of our punka-coolies, and has a sweet, shy face.

The bhisti I shall not regret. I suppose no one could regret a half-wit. How he is able to do his work at all I can't imagine. Very often he does, indeed, forget to put water in the dressing-rooms; and is generally sulky when rebuked. He always looks dirty and untidy, but manages to be picturesque, so much must be forgiven him.

Then the tall, stately figure of our “mali,”\* whom I often see through the drawing-room window, moving slowly about in the vegetable garden. He is an old man, restful to look at and of great dignity. Yes, I shall often think of them all, perhaps with pity, yet there is little need to pity them: they are each of them, in his own way, good at his job: the dhobi† washes and irons magnificently, and the clothes he gets in the morning are generally back the same night. No, they will probably be much, much happier here squatting in the sunshine than E. and I will be struggling to find a job in cold, grey England.

Cold and grey—two most delicious words. How restful they sound, and yet, somehow, stimulating. Grey clouds scudding over a wet, white sky. . . .

\* Mali—gardener, a title in practice only given to the head of a staff of gardeners.

† Dhobi—laundryman. For obvious reasons in India it is necessary to employ and monopolise the services of a laundryman; and if such a servant was found accepting any outside work he would have to be immediately dismissed.

PART SEVEN

“A”

*SOMEBODY'S TIGER*



28th November, 1927.

At the meeting of the Managing Committee the other day, R—— said something to me about eating with him or drinking with him, somewhere, some-when; and I must have said, “Oh, yes, thank you so much, I shall enjoy that”—or whatever it is one does say when one is thinking about many, many other things and is half conscious of a call upon one’s shrunken resources of civility.

After the meeting I remembered nothing, but literally nothing, nothing whatever about it.

Accordingly, yesterday being a public holiday, as about every fourth day seems to be in this country, I sat down after my bath to read a book about gardening in the plains.

I had a great deal of work to do and perhaps I thought that reading about everlasting things, about the perpetual barter between the animal and the vegetable, would calm my nerves.

Perhaps I thought that really my “work” didn’t matter a great deal . . . my work, indeed . . . *il n’y a rien qui m’agace autant qu’une chose qui tourne sur place.* . . . That’s André Gide at his peak in

*Paludes*. I'm so like that electric ventilator . . . “the size larger, for public meetings” . . . which is not a flattering thought.

At any rate, I did not read for long, for an antique American motor-car rattled impudently up to the door; and the syce, having stopped the engine, immediately fell asleep.

Bearer, who was doing something on the front verandah, saw the motor-car and tiptoed to my study to see whom I might be entertaining, I suppose, and, perhaps, whether he would be required to bring coffee, which would have involved baiting the cook, which I suspect is bearer's favourite sport.

Finding me alone, bearer became voluble. There was a car at the door with a sleeping syce. . . . Had I seen this car? There must be a sahib secreted somewhere about the house. . . . Perhaps a mem-sahib had called. . . . Had I seen anyone? . . . It was the Collector-sahib's car. . . . What would the Collector-sahib drink if he had come to see me?

It did, indeed, seem quite probable that someone might have called and shown himself in and sat down in the drawing-room, though I was a little sceptical about bearer's capacity to recognise individual motor-cars.

We looked into the drawing-room.

It next occurred to me that the Civil Surgeon might have come in from camp to see Mary.

I called to Mary.

Bearer could stand the suspense no longer: he rushed like a fighting cock-sparrow with little hops on alternate steps down from the verandah to the waiting car and began to shake the syce.

The syce was an immense and dignified Moslem, whom I thought that I had seen before, but whom I could not place. I retreated to my study.

Mr. D—— appeared with an armful of newspaper cuttings about the strike. A College runner appeared with the mail bag. S—— G—— appeared with a row of bright silver buttons down the front of his tight white baju. As S—— G—— breathed a lighted ripple of silver ran down his great front, and I could watch him digesting the air as if he were a snake digesting a rabbit.

Mr. D—— saw the direction of my eyes and smiled.

“You’re very smart to-day, S—— G——,” I said.

S—— G—— purred out a great breath; and, his deflated stomach and neck being pliable, he bent slightly forward to admire himself.

“A little offering, sair,” he said, “from an old



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student, a B.A., in a word, sair. It was his humble gift.”

“Oh, not humble,” I ventured, “not now that they are in position.”

“Most unworthy, sair, of your fine-flowing compliments,” he said, re-inflating and stroking his paunch. “I will tell my young friend, sair; surely will he be most proud.”

I opened the mail bag with the Principal’s key, which I irreverently keep hung on a nail beside my study door. It is a wonderful key with a great deal of very small Arabic writing round the shaft. It was given to College by an old student, no doubt by a “B.A., sair; it was his humble gift.” I have never understood whether he gave the mail bag as well or whether that was subsequently made to fit the key. I never have time to ask these delightful little questions.

Mr. D—— and S—— G——, between them, solemnly sorted the mail.

Some of the students’ incoming letters are to be censored: it seems a silly performance to me. Either all must be censored or none; and besides, why should a student have compromising letters addressed to him in College when all the bazaar is open to him?

I got my own batch of letters, anonymous for the most part, a few signed. The signed ones I put aside: after all, a signed letter is a very dull thing. It may be a bill; at any rate, I have never known a bill sent out anonymously yet; it may be an invitation to tennis, or an intense letter from an earnest friend at home all eager for the glamour of the East.

But an anonymous letter may be anything:

*Sir,—*

*You are a bastard and of low mind, how therefore shall you teach noble students the way of Kama?*

How, indeed?

*Most honoured Sir,—*

*Now after many days shall I appear before you so with this message shall I greet you before. I am but a drop in the ocean of love which is not made clear to muddy eyes, but being mixed in all I shall be in true fellowship and this letter will come to you and bring prosperity and I shall have the scholarship, for is not C—— College greatest of all so I say thy will be done.*

Quite.

Sir,—

*Your honourable attention to the football is most sought. The team who will play against A—— College is no team of true players, but they will go with money and journey and they are chosen to support well their captain who bestow gifts like a god. Is not their money my money? This I ask. When shall there be a true test of strength that the good may have glory and a high good time? Will you not see it, sir, for the honour of all?*

Not in this world, alas! my friend.

Sir,—

*If you have the disease we have herbs and drugs to cure all quietly and give strength that you shall have men children in constancy.*

*My son is third year student and will give all in an offering if you shall give the sign to stand on the verandah and clap your hands at twelve noon. If you have no disease and cannot anyway sleep that also can I cure in full discretion.*

No doubt! And for that treatment, I suppose that I clap at twelve midnight. . . .

One day I should like to make a complete collection of my anonymous letters; but how should I arrange them?

Mr. D—— looked at the pile of suspicious letters addressed to students who, presumably, have not made terms with S—— G——.

“Mr. Principal, will you read these letters?”

“No,” I said.

“How so, Mr. Principal? They should be opened by your own hand.”

“Mr. D——, does it ever occur to you that I may perhaps sometimes be profoundly bored by the epistolary style and the subtle minds of my dear students?”

“We will let it be, Mr. Principal, it will not matter much.”

I laid the jolly little postcard which began, *Sir, you are a bastard and of low mind*, before D——’s twinkling eyes.

“Tut . . . tut, Mr. Principal . . . Such things should not be among polite students . . . Such things are of no account, Mr. Principal. Surely we shall avert our eyes. This is no manner of address befitting studentship. Ah, Mr. Principal, such things do occur . . . even among the most meritorious. We will let it be, I think, perhaps, Mr. Principal . . . Tears, idle tears.”

Bearer was in a flutter, passing backward and forward before the window.

“What is it?” I called.

The motor-car had been sent for me by the Collector-sahib. I was to kill a tiger, many tigers. Where was my gun? Would my faithful bearer go with me? There would be elephants . . . The Commissioner-sahib was expecting me even now in the jungle.

It all meant nothing whatever to me, and then gradually, as bearer jumped excitedly from foot to foot, something someone had said to me a long time ago began to emerge from my subconscious mind.

“Damn it,” I said, “I remember now. I’ve got an invitation from the Commissioner through the Collector-sahib to go and watch someone kill a tiger; and, by Jove, I’m going to go. Have you ever shot a tiger, D——?”

Mr. D—— smiled at me sadly. “It will be most good and health-giving for the Principal to enjoy a well-earned rest from trivial College toil.”

I gathered that, as parliamentary speakers say, the answer to my question was in the negative.

And at ten o’clock yesterday I set out in R——’s unbelievable Chevrolet for my first, and I suppose my last, day’s sport in British India.

The rains are long finished. The “cool” season is upon us; but the Christmas holidays not having

begun, there is no particular demand for elephants; besides, was not my host M—— himself?

I was very, very frightened . . . Not of the tiger. . . . I felt assured that he would be properly dealt with . . . but the word *shikar* implies more than tigers. . . . Mrs. M——, elephant sickness, the Chief Justice's wife . . . (I dislike a woman whose profile is so good to look upon that to meet her shrewd eyes is a disappointment) . . . Leeches.

I didn't know much about leeches till yesterday. I was not the only young man in shorts, but it seems to me that they are garments peculiarly ill-fitted to the “rigours of the chase.”

The Chevrolet found the elephants just in time. Old M—— had mounted already into the battered “howdah” (or whatever the boat is called that floats upon the ripples of that gigantic back); but, anyway, I was not destined for that august first elephant. I saw M—— shake his head; but I do not think that he was thinking of my little affairs. R—— followed the Commissioner and a number of other illustrious people whom I do not know followed R——.

I hid myself quickly among the ladies, and kept as near as I could to the Civil Surgeon, who seemed to be in charge of the second contingent.

Mrs. Civil Surgeon is one of the few very rich

women in this station, and seemed to be in a considerable flutter yesterday, and, as it seemed to me, quite glad to see me and on the point of disclosing to me some tremendous confidence, but nothing came of it.

I knew that there might well be more to this parade than the chance killing of a stray tiger, but I did not guess at this early hour for just what tremendous stakes the game was being played.

The elephantine *rendez-vous* was low ground at the more open end of a narrow rising gully, almost clear at the bottom, but thickly covered upon either side, rising into what looked to me like almost virgin jungle.

The ground on to—no, into—which we dismounted was marshy; and the leeches, though they suck for the most part painlessly enough, troubled me rather, and I kept bending down and prodding them with the lighted end of my cigarette, and missed, I think, a good deal of what happened.

Mrs. Civil Surgeon had become merrier and seemed particularly delighted that the scene of to-day's campaign should be this particular gully.

. . Nullah, she called it, of course, but all gullies are nullahs in this country.

Here, forty years ago, her father (a magnificent

shot, we understood) had saved the life of an Indian prince. To-day she and her husband were back here ready to save everybody's, anybody's life; and in England her two sons were, one at Winchester, another at New College, learning to save people's lives when their turn came in just this nullah.

Indian civilians, going round from nullah to nullah, from generation to generation; and oh, what was it all for? . . . Could it all be for tigers? What is the use of tigers? They make extremely uncomfortable rugs and hideous overcoats. Were these young Englishmen being bred and reared exclusively for tigers? How fine a thing it must be to shoot a tiger.

Mrs. Civil Surgeon was herself the daughter of a distinguished civil servant, a governor indeed, had married a civil servant and was breeding civil servants; and out there, a mile away, at the head of the nullah, where the midday haze took the tops of the trees up into the sky, had always been, and was still, tiger mating with tiger, begetting tiger, to lord it over the same nullahs and fall for the shots of the same family.

“How we do come back!” Mrs. Civil Surgeon tittered. “How we come back . . . From nullah to nullah, and back again. Eh?”



The first contingent, from the first two elephants, was scattered over the ground in little groups, dividing and re-forming and waiting till the ritual hour.

Mrs. M——, dressed, despite the heat, in a leopard-skin coat, came over and talked to Mrs. Civil Surgeon for a moment about numbers; but I did not gather exactly to what the numbers referred. . . . She can hardly have been talking about abstract plurality.

Then she said, talking still to Mrs. Civil Surgeon, but smiling at me reassuringly, as at a child who is, on the whole, behaving quite well and keeping quiet, something about the recent riots at C——. Someone whispered just audibly behind me, “It ought only to be a matter of mathematics for the knighthood now.”

Mrs. M—— perhaps did not hear, but presently she dropped back into numbers, “Fourteen tigers in twenty-seven years.” Could it be that mathematics was not her strong suit?

“And now, where is that dear husband of yours?” she said, raising her voice. “Oh, Henry, there you are; but what’s a woman to do? No pockets, you know. I’ve lost my snuff-rag. But you always have a perfect supply of such wonderful, big, sensible

silk handkerchiefs. Will you be a dear and lend me one?”

Mrs. Civil Surgeon looked very like a tiger under her yellow hair, irrepressible even beneath a topee.

The Civil Surgeon took out a clean folded white silk handkerchief and shook it out from one corner before handing it to Mrs. M——.

“One can always rely on *you*,” she said, taking the handkerchief. “You’ll take your party up the right bank. John and I shall take the first station on the left bank. I expect we shall be moving off soon.”

The dispositions were even as Mrs. M—— had said.

The left-bank party moved off first, climbing slowly out of the swampy ground and being quickly lost in the thick jungle.

Mr. and Mrs. M—— led the way, having farthest to go, right up toward the head of the nullah on the left bank.

Five minutes later our party moved off to the right, and Colonel C—— and Mrs. C—— took me with them, keeping low in the short undergrowth and rising to our station only when, in half an hour, we were directly under it.

Mrs. C—— leaned against a tree. The Civil

Surgeon found a fallen trunk and investigated its under side for snakes and scorpions and, being satisfied, got down upon one knee and so adjusted himself that he was able to make the most of the steadying support of the fallen timber.

Somebody, quite unexpectedly and for no valid reason, gave me a delicious sandwich. I ate it and enjoyed it, and yet I have no more idea what it may have contained than would an R.A.F. pilot "looping the loop" have any idea of the distinct sequence of emotional stresses which go to make up that particular "ariel" thrill.

While I ate my sandwich somebody put into the Civil Surgeon's hands a gun.

We, presumably, had been the last to take up our stations, for we had had the farthest to go along the right bank and the left-bank party had started before us. Now that we were lodged the silence of the breathing jungle was complete again; the silence of perpetual sound, the silence of life, not the silence of death.

Of the party on the other side nothing was visible, nothing was audible, they had become for the time being part of the indigenous life of the great Indian plains.

There must have been, I think, about four

stations upon each bank, say twelve Europeans upon each side of that nullah, in little groups of about three, hidden from each other, waiting . . . for what? A tiger? . . . Social success? . . . Sport? . . . A knighthood? . . .

When, after the appropriate number of years, and perhaps of tigers, a Commissioner becomes a Governor, a knighthood is fairly certain. Further, it is in fact perhaps true that it would, indeed, be odd, be almost *outré* and in bad taste, to appoint a man to be a Governor of a province who had never shot a tiger.

Yet I remember a delightful story told of the Viceroy, Lord Reading, in fact, who was taken to shoot a lion (there are still half a dozen in India).

It appears that His Excellency's mahout had carelessly dropped a gilded and be-diamonded slipper from the august back of the vice-regal elephant. When the lions came into view Lord Reading observed that they were a lioness and her cubs. One of the cubs found the slipper and, with his mother, played with the precious toy for a considerable time, and finally took it off with him back into the jungle. The Viceroy neglected to fire a single shot in defence of the slipper; but, when the lioness and her cubs had finally disappeared, he dismounted,

so the story goes, and sent a telegram to Lady Reading, saying that he had spent one of the happiest hours of his life. I know not whether the story be true, but it interests me to note how mixed a reception the story has out here in this land of jaundiced “he-men.”

Anyway, of course, such delicacy must be easier for a Viceroy; but Colonel C—— is alleged to be one of the best shots in India. He is, withal, a very charming, accommodating and modest man.

The deep blue of the barrel of his gun gleamed in the hot, damp light. I was within a yard of him, kneeling, too, and just in front of Mrs. C——.

Whether because of the suspense of the long climb or the heat I could not say, but I felt oddly giddy: this, however, was a fashionable day's shikar with a Commissioner present, and we had not long to wait.

A very considerable sum of money and much time had been devoted to this day's entertainment. Human resource and civil resources had been commandeered, three elephants had brought us to our hunting ground, probably more than a hundred beaters beyond the ridge at the end of that nullah had but awaited the signal to advance. Food, drink, service, such details had not been neglected.

. . . I might have known that the tiger would not be overlooked.

Exactly whence he came I cannot be sure. I did not see him till he was in the middle of the dried stream bed in the bottom of the nullah.

Exquisite, he came, indifferent, neither striding nor lolling, moving neither fast nor slowly. He came majestically down from the ridge . . . utterly, utterly alone.

A hundred beaters had disturbed his midday rest; not improbably, I thought, he knew already that before him, as well as behind him, were his enemies, yet he did not deign to turn his head. His pride, his strength, his careless and yet restrained indifference, were among the loveliest things that I have ever seen.

When he was almost opposite to us, almost exactly between the first stations upon either side, he lifted his head and smelled the evil thing that had come into his kingdom; but he disdained it still, and walked on.

Alone, and with the genius of royalty, he came level with us. I was with him, down there in the bottom of the nullah, my thoughts of the Civil Surgeon and his wife, my knowledge of our dispositions, I was using these things only from his

point of view, planning how I should turn my knowledge to the best account, how I should turn myself and climb back into the undergrowth at the head of the nullah.

Suddenly Mrs. C——’s hand came down on to my shoulder, to steady herself in her excitement, and to allow her to bend over to hold more intently this moment of vision: instantly, I was back once again among the hunters. Mrs. C—— pressed my shoulder till it hurt and then Colonel C—— fired.

Immediately, from the opposite bank, there was a second report as the Commissioner followed the lead.

The tiger leapt forward in one glorious bound: a third shot sounded, but I could not tell whence it came.

The tiger lay still where he had fallen, and, after a moment, rolled on to his side and was lost to sight in the rank grass. Mrs. C—— pushed past me to the edge of our cover. Colonel C—— did not move.

Just opposite to us on the other bank, not two hundred yards away, but separated by all the deep nullah and the deep tragedy that lay there now, so still, the brilliant leopard-skin coat of Mrs. M—— came out from the undergrowth.

As she stepped clear, with a triumphant gesture,

she lifted her hand above her head and shook out Colonel C——’s handkerchief to be a pennant in the midday sun.

Her voice came across to us as clearly as across a drawing-room: “John’s tiger!” she cried. “Splendid, really splendid! Such a shot!”

Mrs. C—— took my arm as, presently, preceded by innumerable shrieking beaters and servants, we climbed down into the nullah behind a screen of guns. I thought her hand trembled.

We stood over the body of the great beast, spoiled now, lovely no more, hideous and menacing in death. (The beaters had made very sure of its death before we were permitted to approach.)

We watched the body turned about for our inspection. Two bullets seemed to have struck the tiger, one in the tail, while the other seemingly had entered at the left ear. Perhaps the tiger had turned round, unobserved by me, before the Commissioner had fired.

I found that I was shivering.

“We must make our way back to tiffin,” said Mr. M——. “I consider that a very good start.”

We purred our approval as we turned away from the carcase toward our superb lunch.





PART SEVEN

“B”

*THE COMMISSIONER'S LADY*



28th November, 1927. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

I did not write up my diary yesterday because E. was away all day at his first tiger shoot, and, when he got back last night, we sat and talked about it. I was very much amused by it all; but he seems to have been rather exasperated. He promised to write it all up for some magazine, some day: I must keep him up to this. I believe he has been writing to-day, but what he writes for himself isn't always too publishable, and it would be a pity to waste yesterday's story, for really *the* incident of the day must have been very, very funny. What an odd country we live in, where, in order to get promotion, a man must be a first-class shot . . . or better and safer still, a first-class bluffer.

I wish I could have been there, but with a baby coming I suppose elephant riding would not be very sensible. I'm full of respect, somehow, for Mrs. M—— as a wife, at least. Old Mr. M——, C.I.E., or C.S.I., or whatever it is, would never have got where he has without her pushing and prodding and shoving and kicking. What a woman! and yet, no

wonder everyone loathes her.

Now about this clock.

This morning just after E. had left for College, bearer came in and said that there were two fortune-tellers asking admittance. I've always had a weakness for having my fortune told, perhaps, and yet I find it hard to tell why I told bearer to show those two men round to the back verandah. I think bearer himself was surprised, but there it was: they were shown round, two tall, evil-looking turbaned men, one in a grimy saffron robe, the other in cinnamon draperies. They were very peculiar.

I sat in one of the Singapore deck-chairs: they squatted in front of me: after a rather painful silence one of them asked me for a sheet of paper, and when bearer had brought this, told me to write the word “God” fifty times. This, of course, was hard work, but I did it, and when I had finished he said solemnly: “With that face never much money,” which seemed a poor reward for so much pious industry.

The whole performance was rather a farce, and, perhaps, hardly worth recording in detail; yet these two men were really very impressive, and it is interesting to note the mechanism of solemnity, if not actually of awe.

After the "face and money" episode they muttered together for a minute or two and then asked me for a piece of my clothing and a cake of soap. Much mystified, I went and found an old woollen jumper and a half-used cake of Roger and Gallet's Oiellet. They took both of these without haste, and without thanks, but presently announced that they would pray for me. Then it seemed that we had all lost our cues and were left in the air, not knowing what to do. The fortune-tellers remained seated, motionless and dignified: perhaps they were praying for me.

Bearer remained hovering about nervously at the far end of the verandah, like a small terrier on guard, feeling that he ought to bark at tramps, but not quite sure of these particular tramps.

Then E. came up suddenly, back from College. I explained who the men were. He noticed that one of the men had got my jumper spread over his knees; told bearer to get it from them, to give them a rupee each and to tell them to go at once.

Bearer yapped delightedly at them for a moment and snatched the jumper, which the fortune-teller released at once.

The two men got up slowly, and one of them said, looking mournfully at E——: "Mouth hard, but heart kind." The other said: "Sahib go over the sea

mighty quick, yes?” Then they salaamed and padded off.

Bearer said they had walked all the way down from Nepal. They looked a couple of villains, but they had a way with them; E.’s appearance was certainly opportune. The fortune-tellers had been so sure of themselves, I had been so puzzled and mystified and so uncertain what I wanted to do; and bearer is so tiny that I feel that they might have been with us for a long time, if E. had not come down, for some paper or other, just when he did.

After lunch E. noticed that my little gilt and tortoise-shell travelling clock had disappeared from my desk in the drawing-room. It had been there this morning, I knew, for I had wound it up and put it right just before the fortune-tellers had arrived.

When E. got back to College he telephoned to the police, and in a quarter of an hour a sub-inspector was salaaming on the drawing-room verandah.

He was a stout and competent Hindu, young, brisk and business-like, behaving somehow more like a Moslem, perhaps because he must be so surrounded by Moslems in the police. His khaki drill-jacket and shorts were clean and tidy, and his

puttees were neatly wound, and, since he wore shoes, these did not look so ridiculous as they do above bare feet; but surely a puttee and a boot do belong to each other.

The sub-inspector listened "keenly," as I am sure he would have said himself, and made notes in a very new-looking pocket-book. His rather oily face became more and more set in a complacent smile, and before the end of the interview I felt convinced that he was going to produce the missing clock from some part of his person, like a conjurer flourishing the silk handkerchief which one imagines one has seen him tear up only a moment before.

As a matter of fact he didn't produce the clock, though in the light of what has happened since, I see that he must have been very sure where it was. He had all the servants called in, one by one, and snapped at them for about a quarter of an hour.

I watched all their faces, but I could gather nothing from them: they none of them showed by the flicker of an eyelid that this procedure was disturbing to them in the least.

I had, of course, told the S.I. about the fortune-tellers as soon as he had arrived, but to my immense surprise he had seemed to dismiss the possibility of their being concerned, though I tried to impress on



him the fact that they had certainly had an opportunity to snatch up the clock as bearer had shown them round by the open drawing-room doors on the north verandah.

Finally, after the examination of the servants, he smiled at me very blandly, and salaamed and saluted and took his leave. I suppose he was here for about twenty-five minutes in all, and I suppose he must have left the house at about half-past two.

At five o'clock there he was again, bowing himself up the steps of the drawing-room verandah, more sub-inspectorish, more oily and more self-satisfied than ever, clock in hand.

Apparently the little punka-coolie whom we had to sack last week had stolen it, and had been caught red-handed by one of the police just as he was trying to sell it to a pawnbroker in the bazaar this afternoon at about half-past three.

It was the speed of the thing which frightened me, making me wonder just how it was done and whether the poor boy was really guilty or merely a pawn in some game of which we shall never know the rules or the purpose. Just think of the size of the bazaar. C—— is a city about twice as big as, say, Nottingham. The clock must have cost four or five pounds. Is it probable that the whole police of a

vast city were on the look-out for that little clock? When India is inefficient it makes me tremble; but when it is efficient it makes me shiver. Poor boy, too: he was asking a rupee for the clock. Just think of it, one and fourpence! Now, already, he's in gaol. E. will have to go down and attend his trial. I'm thankful I shall not have to be there. He was a particularly nice boy, too, good-looking and amiable. He used to fall asleep at his job less often than some of the others, too. I feel very, very sorry for him. They gamble, of course: they all do, for tiny sums, with their tiny wages, then they get into the hands of money-lenders like every other Indian, and they get desperate, I suppose, and do something foolish like stealing. A punka-coolie, anyway, must necessarily be out of work for half the year. What can they do?

However, between the two visits of the oily sub-inspector a very, very great deal happened to me. I have had two other visits this afternoon, and the whole “civilian” point of view spread out before me, and my nerves were just sufficiently on edge to make me particularly awake. The “civilians” seem to me to be just about as muddled as everyone else in this country, and to embrace just as many contradictions.

Mrs. M—— was my first caller. She made herself felt, all right. She had obviously been sent by her husband to try to persuade me to persuade E. to withdraw his resignation.

She didn't set about her business very tactfully: we were still shaking hands when she burst out: "What's all this I hear about your leaving C——? Now, Mrs. Charles, don't you think this is very stupid? You like being here, don't you? What do you want to go away for? Your husband gets a good, a very good salary. You've no children . . . yet, that is to say. Why don't you buy a nice little car, and you could run about all over the country . . . get down to the club in a minute and . . . and . . . do lots of things you can't do now?"

"Well," I said, "the idea of buying a car is quite out of the question. We couldn't possibly afford it. As it is we can only just get along without getting into debt."

"Oh, debt," she said. "Why, in India everyone's in debt. . . . That is to say, *nearly* everyone," she added hastily. "But *you* oughtn't to be in debt," she went on, flashing her ear-rings energetically at me. "You must be very bad managers if you are, anyway. With your husband's salary and only your two selves to think of. . . . Why . . . you ought to be

able to get along very comfortably . . . very comfortably, indeed. Why, when John and I were first married, we had much less than you."

Oh dear, how very trying I do find it sometimes that everyone knows how much everyone else is earning in this country. However, Mrs. M—— went on apace. . . .

"And in less than a year we had twin boys to provide for."

She looked at me triumphantly: her ear-rings danced vigorously, as if they were sharing in her triumph; and the *tout-ensemble* I found irritating.

"Well, anyway, I hope we shall be spared that," I said. "I shall be very disappointed if my baby is not a solitary girl."

It was wicked of me, for, of course, I said this on purpose, having discovered without much difficulty Mrs. M——'s quite good-natured, but profound contempt for her own sex. This seemed to nonplus her, for she said nothing for a moment. Her light blue eyes darted restlessly about the room. Thank goodness it happened to be well dusted.

"Well, well," she said, "I daresay the baby coming makes you feel rather unsettled, Mrs. Charles, but believe me, your baby can be born comfortably here." What a strange adverb to use, I

thought, but she went on at once: “And you’ll both be well looked after, and he, or she, can stay with you out here quite a long time before it’s necessary to send it home. All my children—I’ve had six, you know, five boys and a girl—have been born out here, and they’re thoroughly healthy.

“So, you see, I . . . er . . . we both, very much hope that you’ll be able to stay on here.

“Once the child’s come you’ll be able to get about and enjoy yourself; and you’ll be a different person. . . . Yes, you will! . . . What a pity you couldn’t come to the tiger shoot yesterday. My husband killed a really beautiful tiger: it was a good shot. Yes, Colonel C—— said he’d never seen a better; but of course John really is naturally a fine shot. All his family have a wonderful eye. I always say that if you’re not born with a good eye, no amount of practice can really do any good. What a pity your husband doesn’t shoot, Mrs. Charles! I always think a man who can’t shoot . . . er . . . er . . . misses such a lot; but, of course, I know your husband is very clever. Mustn’t let him use his head too much, you know. Good, healthy exercise, that’s the thing. Good, plain common sense and not too much thinking . . . knowing what you want and getting it, that’s the way to get on. At least, that’s

my idea . . . that's how the Commissioner and I have managed. . . . But, of course, you know how one does manage . . . everything . . . if one wants to."

I do, indeed, I thought, much better than you know. Even down to the details of claiming a tiger which your husband perhaps hasn't shot. However, I only said: "Well, it's most awfully kind of you to be so interested in us. . . . But I don't think we shall be able to stay on here . . . for many reasons. I'm sorry for some things, especially as you and Mr. M—— have been so kind to us since you've been back; but we both of us feel we shall never, never understand India or the Indians; and it's not fair from any point of view to . . ."

"But whoever *thinks* of understanding them?" she almost screamed. "My dear Mrs. Charles, you're both making a very great mistake if you think you'll ever be able to *understand* them."

I shall never forget the withering scorn of the word "understand."

"They don't need to be understood. . . . They don't want to be understood. They exist simply and solely . . . to . . . to mystify, as they imagine, ordinary people like you and me. That makes them feel so important. That's what they love, that's the

breath of life to them, and that's what we've got to know how to play up to.

“Treat them like stupid children, quite kindly, of course, and they'll respect you. Once you attempt to consider them and their feelings, you're lost.

“Believe me, Mrs. Charles, I know. I've lived here for thirty years. I've seen every kind of Englishman come here and try to treat the Indians in every kind of way. Kindness, conciliation, consideration. . . . Useless! There's only one way, one decent way. . . . Be hard! Never go back on your word, even though afterwards you may know you're wrong. But don't, for Heaven's sake, pretend to understand them. Give them that much: that flatters their vanity, and it's all they've got. But show them you despise them: that they understand, that they respect. They've got to understand you, not you them.”

She paused for a second to take breath, and just then bearer announced: “G—— sahib.”

I was sorry. I had been enjoying Mrs. M——'s tirade enormously; and I had been liking her better than ever before. For the first time I had caught a glimpse of the hard fight she and the Commissioner must have put up here in order to get where they are now; and it was obvious that to her it had only

been part of what she would have called a very ordinary life, of which she did not think she had the right to be in any way proud. I recognised the truth of all she had said, and yet. . . .

When Mr. G——\* came in Mrs. M—— got up to go. "Well, I'm afraid I've stayed much too long," she said. "But now you know what I think. Perhaps Mr. G—— will be able to tell you better than I can how foolish you and your husband are to give up India. Mr. Charles has made a splendid start. . . . He takes just the right line with them. In a few years he might get anywhere."

Yes, I thought, if he's not murdered in the meantime.

After she'd gone I asked young G—— what he thought about our present general policy with the Indians.

I think he's a charming youth, red-haired and freckled and full of energy. He is only twenty-three, and so still bubbling over with *joie de vivre*. Nearly everything is still "topping" to him. All the same he is one of the new recruits to the I.C.S., and so I supposed his ideas would be very different from Mrs. M——'s. Besides, they come from

\*Mr. R—— G—— was the young acting assistant collector of C——. The youngest member of the I.C.S. whom we met.



different social spheres.

"Oh well," he said, "of course, old M——'s getting to the top of the tree. I suppose there's no doubt he's a good chap. Gets on well with the 'wogs'; and always gets his own way with them, too; but, after all, he's over sixty. Things have changed since he first joined the I.C.S. That 'he-man stunt' is a wash-out now. None of these half-baked 'wogs' would stand for it with anyone younger than the Commissioner. . . . Anyone who hasn't had his position established for the last twenty years. We've got to take quite a different line now. . . . That's what makes it so damned difficult for us. . . . To hear Mrs. M—— and her pals talking makes me sick sometimes. She doesn't understand one thing about India, as it is now. My God, if we took her advice there'd be a lot more of us murdered than there are now, not that that would matter much, but it'd be bad for the prestige of the British Raj.

"No, no, what we've got to do now is to slap 'em all on the back, ask how the 'missis' and the baby are, tell 'em what damned fine chaps they are and so on; but keeping a sharp look-out for trouble all the time.

"The mailed fist in the velvet glove; and we

English are so damned bad at that game. They see what we're up to and laugh at us for it. They know they were born better at that hanky-panky than we can ever be. But what can we do? With all this education the 'wogs' are getting so smart. They aren't the simple blokes they were twenty years ago, when your husband's father was out here. They've been asking each other and everyone else for quite a while why they shouldn't govern their own country, and what right we have here, and other little questions of the same kind, all beautifully wrapped up in long words and sentences, of course. If you say we're here by right of conquest and by commercial treaties, they'll wind you up in a long philosophical and religious argument till you feel that you're in the middle of a ball of wool.

"No, now the 'wogs' are getting their tails up. . . . Now they've got the idea fixed in their woolly pates" (he was speaking metaphorically, I take it) "that they should be ruling themselves, we've got to humour 'em.

"No good trying to point out that they're no more capable of ruling themselves at this moment than—than a troop of monkeys. . . . You've just got to treat them as the attendants at a lunatic asylum treat the 'lunies'—agree with everything they

say and go on your own way. If they get a bit too violent, put 'em in the strait-jacket."

"But that can't last for very long," I said.

"No, of course it can't," he said. "Home Rule is coming, and it'll be like hell let loose when it comes, and while it's coming, too, we're going to have a bloody time. Oh, why didn't my mother make a bank clerk of me?" he added with a broad grin.

"Tell me," I said, "is it true that most of the I.C.S. are in debt to the Government?"

"Of course they are," he said. "What else do people think we come out here for? I mean, there must be some compensation for this sort of hokey-pokey. I mean, after all, this isn't much of a life for a man, now, is it, Mrs. Charles?"

"Well," I said, "I thought you liked it."

"Oh, I do," he said. "It's topping! Why, I've been carrying a couple of revolvers for three weeks now. When you're a bachelor that's all right; but you know a man's got to think of the future, Mrs. Charles. It'd be simply rotten for one's wife and kids never to know if daddy were coming home as a corpse or on his own two legs. I feel awfully sorry for R—— sometimes when I see him slipping his revolvers into their holsters. Good thing his wife

and children are in England most of the time; but then think of the journey money that it eats."

"How is Miss T——?" I asked.

"Oh, she's all right," he said, blushing crimson. "The Commissioner was very rude to her the other day. You know, she has an Eton crop. Well, at the club dance, what do you think he said? 'I like you much better with your hat on.' She was furious."

"She shouldn't pay any attention to Mr. M——," I said. "I'm sure he only makes these remarks to see how people will take them."

Then E. came in, and we talked of College affairs.

I found these two conversations very illuminating. I had no idea until to-day that young G—— saw things as plainly as he does. I thought him a very nice, simple and rather stupid boy; but he has sized up the situation very accurately, as it seems to me, and is under no illusions about the difficulty of the time ahead of him. If I have sometimes thought the Commissioner and Mrs. M—— plucky, how much more so ought I to think young G——. Mr. M—— had all the authority of the British Raj to back him when he joined the I.C.S.

Now, in order to earn the approval of Government, one must tread, oh, so warily and circum-

spectly, so delicately and diffidently, and, as G—— says, Englishmen are so bad at that: Indians can defeat them at seeming diffidence every time.

If only Mrs. M—— were right. If only it were our job to make the Indians understand us, not we them; but that happy day is long since past.

We have adopted and pursued the “policy of conciliation” for many years now, and we must pursue it now till the end, till India throws off her “chains” and is “free”—free to do what?

It is mercifully late now: I needn’t think about that. I wish we hadn’t reported the loss of that clock.

PART EIGHT

“A”

*JUSTICE?*



1st December, 1927.

My birthday to-day, so Mary gave me a dressing-gown: this was a great surprise because we bought the silk together a week ago, and the durzi\* has been sitting on the verandah sewing it, and holding the other end with his toes to keep the seam taut, for the last five days.

It has been a remarkable birthday. . . . I've seen a lot of Indian life to-day.

Some people do, I think, really enjoy taking responsibility, "the white-man's burden." When I'm angry enough I daresay I, too, do things that are intolerably summary; but how I hate myself afterwards.

This morning I did nothing but sit and watch the emotions of physical fear contort a poor boy and his mother. I sat, for the most part, in cold-blood, and felt little but revulsion, repugnance, loathing.

Yet I had, after all, suffered no hurt when I went into the court-room. Further, I could, I fancy, have withdrawn my charge at any stage, but I sat on impassive and repelled; and I suppose I came away a

\* Durzi—native tailor paid by the hour.



worse man: my ex-punka-coolie, though he is probably no better, is at least no worse for this day's justice.

It is true that I received a chit yesterday from young G——, summoning me to court this morning for the trial of our punka-coolie; but I wonder why I went. Not surely because I was summoned. Was it curiosity or was it because the police had kept the clock as a *pièce d'accusation* and that I hoped after the trial to be able to reclaim it and bring it home?

If so, my hopes were fulfilled. I don't think I have ever liked the clock. Next time it disappears it will be I who will have thrown it out of the window.

I've never been to court before in India, and I think I was prepared to be not so much harrowed as frightened. Vaguely, I had in my mind that I should have to meet the judge. I don't particularly dislike the man, though I think him bumptious, but I do dislike his wife, with her good looks and her blank, white face.

However, it didn't happen like that. One forgets that C—— is a huge town, and that the judge is sitting in the Sessions Court (he may even sit in a wig for all I know, but a wig in the monsoon would be very unpleasant). I don't even know where the “Sessions Court” is, and I can't imagine what it does.

I thought in India there were only two classes, money-lenders and money-lendees. I daresay the “Sessions Court” hears claims for vast sums of ten rupees and over.

My tonga put me down at some distance from the pink, brick building, and sheered rapidly away, as if finding the locality distasteful. A great number of sleeping coolies woke up and pointed at me and a certain number of pert young police-boys saluted, and asked me my business in English, in Hindi, in Urdu.

I hadn't any exact idea what my business was, but I was presently taken through a maze of dark and filthy passages, and let out at the other end into a room completely full of tobacco smoke.

Across this stinking fog I could see nothing at all; but other eyes, more used to local conditions, apparently spotted my entry, for several pairs of hands clutched at my arms and my hands. The touch was greasy and I supposed, therefore, black. I felt hastily for my pocket-book, which was, however, safely in my breast pocket.

Young G——'s voice said: “Hullo, Charles, old man, jolly good of you to have come down. You're a bit early or we're a bit late. It doesn't matter. I'm supposed to be hearing another case, but it can wait. I'll call your punka-wallah right now. Come

up and sit on the bench. Hil Get a chair for the Principal-sahib.”

I was getting used to the haze now, and could see G—— sitting on a raised platform about one foot above a room packed with humanity, which was all sitting on the floor, save for a row of gentlemen with closely cut hair and bullet heads, who sat on a bench, their backs to me, facing and close up to G——’s table.

I was passed, like a bad penny, from hand to hand, and stepped into and over people’s laps, and finally I was pushed between two of the bullet-headed gentlemen up against the dais itself.

“Up you come, old man,” said young G—— as if he were modestly making light of having rescued me from drowning in the Ganges. “Bit of a fug in here, I expect. . . . Have a cigarette? . . . I tell you what . . . I’ll get a punka going.” Then in a louder voice: “Mr. Bannerjee, get a punka-coolie active, will you?”

“Most assuredly, Mr. G——, sir, the air hangs most heavily in this court to-day. The breath of the punka will be most agreeable . . . I will instruct.

. . . My poor client, Mr. G——, having come from far, would beg of you to hear this action, if it please

you, sair. Are we not, sair, with sails full set and in full flight?”

“Damn that, Mr. Bannerjee. . . . You heard what I said . . . I want to hear the police and what they’ve got to say about Charles-sahib’s punka-coolie. . . . You sit down and get someone busy with that punka.”

“Most sairtainly, sair. But my poor client . . .” Then Mr. Bannerjee shut his mouth with a greasy cluck and turned round and opened it again and began to whisper to a very old woman behind him. Then he got up and walked heavily across the sea of humanity to the door by which I had lately come in; and presently an immense and perilously hung punka on creaking hinges began to sway above our heads, driving down the hot, fetid air, and the stale smoke of many yesterdays.

In self-defence, I took a cigarette; but it tasted disgusting.

Young G—— asked me proudly if I had ever been to court before. I said “No,” rather uncompromisingly, and our conversation was momentarily held up; and we sat there silently above the moaning, squirming, whispering crowd on the floor below, and opposite to the row of fat, dark-skinned gentlemen, whom I had previously seen

from behind. These were now revealed to me as a row of vakils waiting for briefs.

I have never seen a row of more evil and more ugly-looking faces. They sat quite silently, looking scornful, and perhaps passing the time by counting the drops of sweat falling from their noses, for they all seemed to be squinting; but I believe squinting is a religious art in this country, and is said to be of great help in attaining the contemplative ecstasy of indifference.

Unexpectedly a door was thrown open and a horrible jangling noise, like that caused by the dropping of an anchor, came in above the low, discontented grumble and moan of the court-room.

I was sitting on young G——’s left hand, and I looked to my left toward the open door.

Over the human floor my punka-coolie, almost naked, was being pushed by three young police. The boy was in chains from hands and feet, the two hand chains being cast together after the third or fourth link from the wrist, and the foot-chains giving a play of about eighteen inches between the ankles. The two wrist and the two ankle chains continued, each as a single chain for a yard or two into the hands of the gaoler.

“Good God!” I said. “What’s the matter with the

boy? He's not violent, is he?"

"Prison without chains wouldn't be prison in India," said G——. "The boy's got to be impressed, or he'll never learn. It's quite all right, though. It's quite usual."

An old woman in the middle of the court began to moan, and the boy took up his position in, or beside, her lap, still standing and smiling rather charmingly, and, perhaps, a trifle inanely, as these naïve aboriginal inhabitants of this peninsula do still, after three thousand years of untouchability.

Very dark-skinned, with European features and a plaintiff docility, such people, I suppose, are destined to be the sport of conquerors till the end of time.

The boy looked around him, and presently recognised me, and his smile broadened sweetly, and he inclined his head as a shy girl might, who had been complimented by her employer.

I said "Good morning," for I could think of nothing else to say, and the boy's greeting seemed to need an answer. Everybody in the room looked at me; and then half a dozen of the round-headed vultures on the long bench in front of us jumped up together, and said exactly simultaneously: "If it please you, Mr. Collector-sahib, I appear for this prisoner."

Young G—— looked backward and forward along the line for some time, coldly, rudely, with loathing.

“Well, Mr. Chatagar, I haven’t heard your voice for some time,” he said.

All but one of the vakils sat down. The one bowed low and said: “Mr. G——, Assistant-Collector-sahib, I will ask adjournment till I consult with my client. . . . The boy is unknown to me. I will withdraw.”

“Better hear the prosecution’s case first . . . then you can have your chat. I shouldn’t think there’s any need to withdraw.”

Mr. Chatagar said: “This is grave case and should require deep consideration, seemingly, Mr. Collector.”

“Appearances are often misleading,” said G——. “Carry on, police.”

The police carried on.

The wheels of this inexorable machine had been set in motion and nothing seemed able to stop them. The gramophone of justice was playing its tune: it would not cease until it was run down; and then it would be too late.

My God, my God, why did I come here? I thought.

Squeaky voices assailed my ears, the stinking court air assailed my nostrils, the boy's eyes watched my eyes, and the sea of humanity beyond and below the table at which we sat began to heave a little. I got up to go.

"I say, sit down, old chap," said young G——. "We'll go and have something at the Club after this case, if you'll come with me. It won't take long. Or are you frightfully busy? I want an excuse for getting out, I get such headaches in this court. Besides, you haven't identified the clock or the boy yet."

I sat down because I perceived that, unaided, I simply could not "make" the door.

I shut my eyes for obvious reasons, spiritual as well as physical. I am a coward, and smoke and thought both hurt me. I tried to shut out the squeaky, pleading little voices of the police.

Suddenly the clock was pushed into my hands, and Chatagar was asking me to stand up and, I presume, to take the oath. I blinked and looked rather helpless, I suppose.

G——'s restraining arm came down on to mine. "Don't you get up," he said. "Never heard such damned cheek. . . . Not the slightest need for you to take the oath. These vakils love to show off,



cross-examining a sahib. If the clock is yours just slip it in your pocket.”

I looked at the clock, which was, indeed, very obviously mine. I looked at Mr. Chatagar, who was leering at me close up to the other side of the table, and, because he was standing on the floor below the dais, his face almost on a level with the table, in just about the place where my inkpot would have been if I had been sitting at this desk at home. I had an unaccountable desire to jab a pen into one of his eyes. The whites were yellow, lined with red, the iris and the pupils were very black.

G—— kept his hand on my arm, and gently increased the pressure. Chatagar breathed across the desk. “Mr. Principal Charles, sair, it will be better to do everything in good order, if you want to convict this boy.”

I was nauseated . . . Chatagar’s breath stank, I have never smelled anything so foul, and his soul stank. I put the clock in my pocket with my left hand. “The clock is mine,” I said. “Thank you.”

Because I was now angry as well as nauseated, I kept my eyes open. Mr. Chatagar raised both his hands above his head and then dropped them dramatically to his side.

“Mr. Collector, I crave adjournment to consult

with poor client. . . . This is most fishy case. . . . I will perhaps present affairs very differently when I am well informed.”

“The boy has pleaded guilty, Mr. Chatagar. . . . We’ll wait while you talk to him.”

Mr. Chatagar turned round, and, in doing so, woke up the vakil sitting upon his right, who grumbled noisily and squinted himself to sleep again.

Mr. Chatagar then stepped over his bench and climbed over the human litter to my punka-coolie, whom he began to stroke with soothing motions from the shoulder to the small of the back.

The boy immediately began to cry.

Young G—— leant over to me and whispered: “This is a kind of hell, but it doesn’t mean anything. You soon get used to it: it’s always just the same.”

“Yes,” I said. “Most interesting.”

I saw young G—— register surprise and something like loathing for me; but I didn’t care, and I could not have helped it if I had cared. My mouth was very dry and I could not think of anything to say. I shut my eyes again.

Suddenly I felt a violent tugging and clutching at my legs, which almost pulled me out of my chair; and I brought my hands down with a bang on to the

table to steady myself and to have a counter-leverage. My action was entirely instinctive, as a man will instinctively throw up a hand to steady himself running down a rocky stair in an Apennine village.

The noise of my hands on the table frightened me and woke up everybody in court: from under the table a long, low-pitched moan, almost loud enough to be called a shriek, came up in answer to the crash of my hands.

Three or four policemen rushed forward across the body, or the bodies, of the court-room, and bent at the table.

I looked down and saw an old woman clutching my legs and wildly kissing my hitherto white shoes. Her black, withered hands had gripped my ankles; and through her dishevelled hair I saw her eyes, wild with fear and rather beautiful in a sordid face.

“Christ!” I said. “Is that the mother of the boy?”

“It’s all right,” said young G——. “The police get awfully slack in court. This’ll be a lesson to ’em to keep their eyes open. She must have crawled all the way from the middle of the room. She was squatting beside her son a minute ago. I’m so sorry

it's happened, though, old man: I hope you'll forgive me. She nearly upset your chair, didn't she?”

The police had pulled the old lady back, and two of them were holding her fast. Mr. Chatagar had resumed his consultation with his client. We sat silent for a little while.

Presently I said in a whisper to G——: “Why don't you make these vakils keep their bajus buttoned up? That fat man opposite to you has six long hairs sticking out of the middle of his chest, and one drop of sweat on each of them. It'd make me sick.”

“Hush,” said G——, also in a whisper. “That's just what I can't do. That's the difference between us young chaps and the old school in the old days. It's what I was talking to your mem-sahib about the other day. We can get our own way in the end over big things and keep our own sort of order. We can despise them and hate them, too; but what we can't do any more is to exact the outward forms of respect. These swine are still frightened of me about essentials. They know they can't get round behind my judgments, but I can no more make them show personal respect than I can fly.”

“But, G——, you mustn't mind my asking this—

if you stopped smoking in court yourself, you could stop all smoking, couldn't you? That would be a sort of start.”

“Man alive, I don't chew betel in court, and I don't spit in court; but I can't stop them chewing and spitting . . . I smoke in self-defence. I let that fellow undo the buttons of his coat; but I don't give him any poor man's briefs.”

“Oh,” I said, “I expect you're right.”

“You see, Charles,” he went on, “your position and mine are almost exactly opposite. As Principal of a College,\* you get the outward show, and really quite a lot of pomp. . . . Magnificent buildings and acres of guava park, and contributions from Rajahs who have to be entertained at College expense in return; but your students go on strike, and your professors plot behind your back.

“Here, in court, the scum of the world lie about on the floor, and sit on counsel's bench, too, but the British Raj is still too mighty to plot against. Vakils don't go on strike. Prisoners don't write anonymous letters.

“The difference is that I,† the humble representative of the British Raj, have to see their dirty,

\* Head, that is to say, of a unit of a deferred department.

† An Indian Civil Servant administering to the mechanism of a reserved department.

sweaty chests. I'm nobody, but what I stand for is still everything. In College you're a very important person with a lovely airy office, but you've got nothing behind you. Government gives you a fairly free hand, but it can't back you, really. Lord, it's only just got time to back the administration, it can't back educationists as well.”

Mr. Chatagar turned and came back to his place, and we stopped our whispering.

Mr. Chatagar now adopted a new line, and appealed for mercy. There being, of course, no jury, and conviction and sentence being simultaneous, the plea for mercy quite properly formed part of the defence.

“How much, Mr. Charles, do you esteem the clock is worth?” I was suddenly asked.

I wondered whether Mr. Chatagar expected me to compute the value in days of detention or in some other currency.

“Say five pounds, English,” I said.

Young G—— lent over and spoke to a police-inspector in Hindi; then he turned to me.

“God, it *is* rather pathetic: the boy was asking one rupee for the clock in the bazaar. The ‘chittie’\* actually gave him eight annas for it; and he was

\*“Chittie”—money-lender or pawn-broker.

walking out with the eight annas\* when he was arrested.”

I looked at the boy: he was still smiling through his tears: he tried to move forward to follow his mother's example and clutch my legs, I think.

I shook my head at him; but he did not understand, and thought that I was being hard and unrelenting. He pulled himself suddenly free of the police and with a rattle of chains was through the vakils at my feet.

I was ready this time: I spoke in a loud voice quickly to Mr. Chatagar. “For God's sake, tell the boy in his own language that nobody's going to do him any harm. He's only here to learn that one can't steal with safety.”

While Mr. Chatagar was translating this poor comfort and this deep social lie to the dazed boy, who had been jerked back to his place, young G—— said casually, taking up a pen and writing:

“All right. . . . Ten strokes with the cat.† No

\*Eight annas—half a rupee, i.e. about 8d.

† I learned later that sentence could not be carried out till it had been confirmed by the Collector, sitting, as it were, *in chambers*.

I find no record of the sentence actually imposed, but my recollection is that we heard before we left C—— that the Collector in due course doubled the number of strokes recommended by his subordinate, while complimenting him upon preferring “strokes” to prison for this first offender.

Since, however, I cannot remember who told us this, I may have dreamed it. I hope so.—*Author's note*, 1933.

use herding the boy with a lot of habitual criminals. Let's go and have a breath of air.”

I shivered. The boy looked at me, not understanding at all what had happened, as G—— and I got up from our chairs.

I shrugged my shoulders in cowardly self-defence, hoping to convey my impotence, but probably only succeeding in conveying indifference.

We struggled out of court, the boy's eyes pleading after me.

None of the counsel present moved in his sleep. They would be there when G—— came back. Perhaps they spend their nights there also.

In my dreams I shall spend my nights there, I fancy, for days to come.

I hailed a tonga, and we drove to the Club.

I stood young G—— a gin-sling. After all, we'd put through a fine deal together, eh? Might as well drink to it. . . . Got my precious clock back, too. I wonder what the rest of the servants think.





PART EIGHT

“B”

*HIGH JINKS*



1st December, 1927. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

To-day is E.'s birthday. My present of a dressing-gown was finished this morning by the durzi and E. will be able to wear it to-night.

When he had gone off to College this morning, and because I knew he'd got to go to court and was hating the thought of it, I thought it would be rather nice to try to find him some slippers to go with his dressing-gown.

In some trepidation I decided to go down to M—— S——'s shop in cantonments and see what I could pick up from the jumble he has heaped up there in every corner of that dark little den. Yet this morning I felt I could not face a tonga: I get so tired, half-clinging, half-perching on that hard little back-seat, swaying and jolting uncomfortably at an angle of forty-five degrees. I asked bearer to try to find me quickly something rather more comfortable in the way of a conveyance.

When it was announced and I went to the front verandah and saw it, I really wondered for a moment whether I could possibly enter such a thing.

It was an aged Victoria, dusty and moth-eaten,

dirty and smelly, and I think it had once been dark blue. Its driver, in his filthy rags, looked very insecure on his rickety box-seat, and the runner, or whatever he is called, even more filthy, clung even more precariously to the back of this ridiculous chariot, his legs apparently on the back-axle, and his thin clutching hands grasping the back of the folded hood.

Well, at any rate, the seat was set at a rather more convenient angle than that of a tonga and, on this thought, I stepped in and sat down rather too light-heartedly, for the seat gave way, and sagged down helplessly beneath me, till at last I found myself resting on a broken spring about six inches above the floor of the carriage. I was a little discouraged, but bearer was already scrambling up to his station beside the driver, and there was nothing for me to do but to shift about till I found a patch of the seat which happened to be unbroken and a trifle less uncomfortable than the rest.

Unfortunately, but for obvious reasons, this was exactly in the middle and I had hard work keeping myself there on my ridge between the two concealed precipices on either side, under the musty cloth of the alleged seat. I felt very self-conscious, too, and must have looked exceedingly prim and foolish and

uncomfortable; indeed, the whole contraption was so ridiculous that no one sitting anywhere in it could fail to look a figure of fun.

The two horses were wretched feeble creatures; neither of them looked, as they stood before the front-door, as if it would have the strength to lift a foot from the ground.

When we started, however, they showed some signs of activity, and we struggled off with a strange, lolloping trot, which gradually slackened to a kind of limp. This didn't surprise me, but bearer started to yap at the syce, and then I saw him laboriously turning off the brake. It took him quite a long time. He wound it up clock-wise to turn it on, and unwound it to take it off. Perhaps all carriage brakes used to be like this, but I can't remember ever having seen one in use before. I found it fascinating. I'm perfectly certain that the syce had never driven before. Not only did he never remember to wind off his brake (which, by the way, he only put on to bring his horses to a standstill for some emergency as, for instance, when the harness appeared to be in danger of slipping off their attenuated frames, or when we had to go through gates), but he held the reins so slackly that they lay in great loops over the horses' backs and over

the front of the barouche.

What was to me really terrifying was that from time to time the driver uttered strange cries, and lashed at his horses savagely with a whip, when they broke into a kind of desperate canter, and we all veered crazily from side to side of the road, quite out of control. I was glad to get safely to M—— S——'s shop.

Old M—— S—— made it his business to remember me, and asked warmly after "the major," as he insisted on calling E.

When I told him I'd come to buy a present for "the major," he really got going.

"Yes, mem-sahib, yes, mem-sahib, many, many fine and elegant presents of each and every variety to see here. Very happy will major-sahib be to receive gift from lady mem-sahib of rich and handsome shawl, perhaps."

"Not a scarf," I said, as he displayed an artificial silk atrocity from Manchester. "I want to find some slippers to wear with a dressing-gown. We bought the silk the other day. Do you remember?"

"I go to search diligently far and wide," he said, not altogether without dignity. "Pray to seat, mem-sahib." And he began to delve among heaps of

tawdry-looking bundles of dimly coloured gauzes in what seemed to be the darkest corner of the shop.

What a mess and muddle the shop is! Much worse than the shops in the bazaar. Full of things new and old, beautiful and hideous, Western and Eastern, genuine and fake; and they all jostle each other uncomfortably. If one were prepared to spend an hour or two carefully searching amongst them, one might be able to make a quite nice collection of Indian silks, copper and brass pots and trays, bits of carved ivory and a great many other things really charming to look upon, if not of any great value. But to pick out one good thing in India one must pass over fifty bits of rubbish. That is no doubt true of every country, but in India the rubbish is rubbish unashamed. Quite three-quarters of M—— S——'s shop is filled with the cast-offs of Birmingham and Manchester, stuff too hideous and "kacha" to sell even in the poorest quarters of our industrial towns; but here it is offered to one, even (and indeed, perhaps, exclusively) to Europeans, with every appearance of serious appreciation.

After much scuffling and heaving, in which his assistant, a lack-lustre boy of about thirteen, joined very half-heartedly, M—— S—— produced, to my horror, a second-hand and rather grubby pair of



Jaeger bedroom slippers, very, very large, too, they were. Where can he have got them from? They were trodden down at the heel.

“Fine beautiful shoes for major-sahib,” he announced, delighted with himself. “Most comforting to feet. Big, but in hot country ask space for footswell. Within see name of great London shop, mem-sahib.”

In the end I got a pair of what I think may well be Persian slippers, very pretty, a sort of rust-coloured leather, ornamented with gold thread and beads. They are rather ornate, perhaps, but I don’t think they deserve E.’s comment that they should be worn on the mantelpiece: they will serve for some time as a souvenir of the East.

When I got back the durzi was just finishing the dressing-gown. He is a dear old man. I like to see him sitting there, cross-legged on the verandah, working away so busily and quietly.

Sometimes he brings his assistant to work his sewing-machine. I have never seen the durzi use a machine himself, and certainly it would accord very ill with his snowy beard and venerable appearance.

I always feel that a blessing is upon the house when he is with us, and when he has gathered up his things and gone, it is as though a shadow had fallen.

This is curious. I haven't had this feeling with anyone else in India and with very, very few people in Europe.

I had only been back for half an hour when the Commissioner's car swished down our little drive and drew up at the front door almost with a snort.

Bearer brought me a note from Mrs. M——, telling me that the Commissioner had kept E. for lunch, and asking me to go back there for lunch, too, and that we would all go on to polo afterwards.

I didn't want to go at all, but I couldn't well refuse, so I changed and set off.

Only Colonel and Mrs. C—— were there, besides ourselves. In spite of them lunch was an uncomfortable meal. Mrs. M——'s conversation was spasmodic. When she thought of anything to say, she burst out with it regardless of who might be speaking or of what.

The Commissioner was in one of his taciturn moods, and, apart from one or two scathing comments on members of the I.C.S., he was silent. He did not look bad-tempered. Obviously, he didn't feel like talking, and that was all. When selfishness is carried to such a pitch it becomes quite interesting. So few of us dare—or is it care?—to practise it so whole-heartedly.

After lunch, however, for one moment, while the various tiger skins with which the billiard room is littered were being shown to us, and when Mrs. M—— had started her account of her husband's wonderful shot the other day, I was glad to see, for the first time since I have known him, an embarrassed smile on his face.

Colonel C——'s eyes were twinkling and Mrs. C——, I thought, rather overdid her admiration of the Commissioner's marksmanship. However, one is never left doing nothing very long when Mrs. M—— is in control, and we were immediately rushed off at break-neck speed to see round the garden.

I suppose in Mrs. M——'s well-ordered mind ten minutes is prescribed as the time to set aside for showing people over the garden. As the garden is very large, and as we had to see everything, even the vegetables, we had a very quick walk, which now and then almost broke into a run. It is a charming garden. A large and beautiful lawn with trees dotted about it is the chief feature.

The lawns in C—— still surprise me by their freshness, though, of course, most of them now are beginning to get a little brown. I fancy that before I came to India I must have pictured all Indian

gardens as dusty squares of hard-baked earth broken up by dry-looking beds of balsams, zinnias and marigolds.

The Commissioner's garden might almost be English, except that the trees are, of course, so un-English, and that here and there magenta masses of bougainvillaea swarm up and over them, and tall hedges of poinsettias stand behind them.

After our hurried scamper round the demesne, we were wedged quickly, tightly, but competently into the Commissioner's car, and driven off to the polo ground.

Mrs. M—— looked very smart, almost Parisian in her jaunty little hat. I cursed myself for not having worn an ordinary hat instead of my heavy, clumsy double-terai; but the danger of sunstroke in this country has been so much impressed on me that I have become very, very cautious. I really believe that, provided you have an adequate sunshade, topees and terais can't be necessary after about three o'clock at this time of year.

The polo was great fun, and exciting as polo always is.

I suppose everyone gets a thrill from the sound of many hoofs drumming on the hard, dry ground, as the ponies gallop up close to one; a thrill and then a

relaxation as they whisk off again, and the sound of the thudding hoofs gets fainter and fainter.

Goals don't interest me much. It is the general movement I find so exhilarating. Speed! What a fascinating thing it is. But best of all the speed of a horse.

Once at the polo Mr. M—— became much more cheerful. I think he is a passionate horse-lover, for he told me that on leave he spends every available moment hunting, attending race-meetings or watching polo, according to the season. He is a strange man. He certainly appears to be much fonder of horses than of human beings. He talked at great length of various wonderful hunters he had had on leave in Ireland, and this very much more warmly than he has ever talked of his own children. He must be an uncomfortable father.

After the polo we were rushed off to the Club, where a tennis tournament is in progress.

It was all just like England, except that the tea was rather better and some of the players had forgotten to take off the topees in which they had started the tournament.

Various ladies had undertaken to provide tea and serve it, and it seemed as though they had vied with each other to produce the richest and most lavish

assortment of cakes and sandwiches. Lemon-yellow, pink and chocolate iced cakes, with elegant "floral devices" sugared over them, almost crowded each other off the tables.

Mrs. M—— was here, there and everywhere, criticising, complimenting, complaining and generally upsetting everyone, I should say.

I felt very sorry for those poor women; they looked flushed and harassed. There they had been, struggling most of the day with tea, and just as everything was going along well, and they were able to ease off a little (we were very late arriving), Mrs. M—— arrived like a hurricane, driving them before her like scattered leaves.

I believe she is president of the 'tea-committee,' so she must make herself felt. Is she really competent, or only just fussy, strong-willed and quite insensitive? I can't tell. Anyway, she succeeds in hypnotising nearly everyone into believing in her competence, and that is all that is necessary in this peculiar world where we take everyone at his, or her, own valuation.

On our way home, in a rather smarter tonga than usual, called for us by a Club servant, E. told me of the trial of the punka-coolie. It seems to have been the usual mix-up of tragedy and comedy.

E.'s description reminded me of the trial scene in *Alice in Wonderland*.

But it must have been awful to have the wretched mother clawing at his legs. And as for the poor boy, I suppose it is better that he should have a few strokes with the cat than that he should be herded even for a few weeks with a lot of hardened criminals, but I hate the thought of it.

Fancy risking all that just for eightpence.

That's what seems so pitiful: it seems unjust, somehow, too.

I quite agree with Mr. Chatagar's remark: "This is most fishy case." Was it possible that by some extraordinary coincidence a policeman should have seen him just at the moment of selling this clock to the "chittie," or is it a "put-up job" to enable some particular policeman to gain quick promotion? If so, was the wretched boy persuaded by someone to take the clock in order to show the quickness of this policeman? Was he bullied into doing it or paid for it? Surely not, and yet in India one is never sure of anything.\*

\*We had, as far as I can remember, no scrap of evidence to warrant these rather morbid conjectures. Perhaps their interest to-day is that they indicate how morbid may become the state of mind of anyone living in our circumstances.—*Author's note*, 1933.

PART NINE

“A”

*THE LAST LAP*





*2nd January, 1928.*

To the casual tourist, at any rate, it seems that the chief preoccupation of the literate classes of Bombay is to avoid reproducing their kind.

I sit in the lounge of the Taj Hotel, and look across at the bookstall (there are many bookstalls, too, and they are all the same), and even from this distance I can see row upon row of Stopes and Fielding, the big green book and the little brown-paper-covered monograph; and I think of the big green praying mantis sitting up on her hind legs and eating husband after husband as soon as he has satisfied her biological needs.

I don't know why I think of these things, except that this is Bombay at last, and that I want to think of other things, and write down my last impressions of C——, and of the plains and the trains and garlands and of my first sniff of the "lapsing, unsoilable, whispering sea"; and I find myself surrounded by contraception.

There must be a reason for it . . . I have lived in Shanghai, in Singapore, in Kobe, and I have never before noticed this preoccupation with the

blessings of infertility.

That contraceptive knowledge and mechanics are as valuable and proper to a well-regulated life as good sanitation, I do not doubt; that a knowledge of these things should be available for the poor (and the rich) I whole-heartedly approve; but why must we have it with the cocktails and again with the lunch and finally with the coffee?

Is it possible that this demand for “extinctive” literature arises because other people feel as strongly about India as I do? No . . . no, I do not see anyone sitting here who looks as if he were the resigning Principal of an Indian College. . . .

Then, why these bookstalls? They seem to me to say: “If it be the white man’s burden to come out and govern India, let us make sure that there shall be no white men left in the next generation on to whose shoulders to lay so intolerable a weight.”

But, of course, the reasons may be quite other. They may have something to do with the cost of the journey home, and the pay of the I.C.S. But then there aren’t any I.C.S. in the Taj Hotel. Why should there be?

*Same day: Evening.*

That was a false start. . . . We're only here for two nights, but we've moved with all our incredible luggage to another hotel. The Taj is an excellent place, I do not doubt, but I couldn't stand the literature, only three books, but rows and rows of them, Michael Fielding, Marie Stopes and "Jesting Pilate."

I haven't seen a bookstall in this more humble hostel.

This bedroom is a corner room, built, as it were, in the arrowhead of masonry between two converging streets, along which trams bang and jangle. The room, perhaps because it is so important, butting out for ever into the busy square below, has a number of ridiculous columns round which I play a kind of hide-and-seek with my luggage and with bearer.

Punkas hang between all these columns, but they are electric punkas and they click as they reach their limit of oscillation, and they make a tiny blue spark in the night.

Bearer has elected to dress himself entirely in khaki for the journey, and looks like a little mud man, but he wears a scarlet belt or girdle, and that,

somehow, gives me a sense of great importance, as if I were a retiring Governor. . . . The association of ideas is not difficult.

I shall be sorry to say good-bye to bearer the day after to-morrow; but sorriest of all because I fancy that his tiny, baby face will pucker up, and that he will weep silently. . . . Perhaps he is very glad that we are going. It has given him a jaunt to Bombay. He will take back a present to his wife, perhaps. . . . To him, to her, Bombay must be a kind of Margate.

What is Bombay to me? . . . The Army & Navy Stores have a branch here. It seems to be the only shop in India at which one may buy those washable, white wrist-watch straps. . . . I don't see how people in the tropics do without them, for you can't wear a stomach-watch, for you don't, presumably, wear a waistcoat, and you don't surely want to sweat into a fixed leather strap for months on end. Perhaps, if you are a real sahib in India, you make your bearer carry your watch for you.

What little things one finds to laugh at at the seaside, when one's ship is already in port and loading cargo.

We went down and saw her to-day. . . . She is very tiny. . . . But it is a good time of year. I wonder who will be travelling with us in an Italian

ship. Surely there are not many Italians in India.

We got our labels to-day. Blue, they are, for the *Cabina*, and green for the *Stiva*. Nothing has ever thrilled me quite so much, not the roar of the Simplon-Orient Express, or the bustle in the Hôtel des Wagons-Lits in Pekin, when the Tientsin train has just arrived, or the sight of my ticket to Hong-Kong when I left Japan.

Green and blue labels, “Bombay—Genova,” “Linea Celere Mensile, Marittima Italiana. Società di Navigazione.”

I love to see again the accent on “Società.” You have to open your lips to say it, clean, disdainful word. What shall I read on board? I would like to read some Italian. I wonder if they have a library on board. God forbid that I should have to stock myself with literature in Bombay, judging by the specimens I saw this afternoon on the Taj book-stalls. No, the “Società di Navigazione” shall provide.

On the journey hither, Mary and I were left for a moment on the metal-way.

That was really what I wanted to describe when I drew out my clerky fountain pen in the Taj Hotel this afternoon.

The sensation of being quite alone in the middle

of the Peninsula of the Indus must obviously be one of the most vivid which may befall a man.

They stopped the train so that we might all walk forward to lunch in the ordinary way. As usual, they stopped it as far as possible from any village, to avoid the risk of burglars or non-fare-paying passengers boarding it unperceived. We were therefore, presumably, as much as twenty-five miles from a station.

We walked forward beside the single track, and looked up at the long, dusty train with its closed, mosquito-wired and dark-blue-glazed first-class carriages, each with its third-class carriage adjoining.

We noted the silent dead look of the first-class windows behind each of which a bearer was presumably now sitting, looking after his master's goods, while the master lunched in the restaurant-car at the head of the train; and we noted, too, the promiscuous life of the third-class carriages, the countless heads stuck out of the windows, and we thought of the countless flies within.

Then we got up into the dining-car and ate our lunch, and talked of worries and money, and the horrible trivial things which “civilisation” keeps in train.

After three-quarters of an hour the train stopped

again for us to go back to our compartments.

Mary and I had drunk each of us a glass of light beer with our lunch, and we were dazed a little, I think, in the midday sunlight after the filtered light behind the blue-glass windows of the stifling dining-car.

Our compartment was in the last coach of the train. Bearer put his head out of the window, adjusting his turban, having obviously slept while we ate. He opened the door from within, jumped down and clambered back to his own adjacent compartment.

We stood looking down into the dried bed of a stream, which would have been a fair-sized river in England, and at the parched cactus on the far bank. The soil was pink and the day yellow, with a hot, hazy sky overhead, and here and there a vulture soaring.

On the ground there was no sign of life. Perhaps the dried cacti and the long-recumbent grasses hid an occasional snake, and somewhere, no doubt, a pack of jackals was in shelter for the day and would make the night hideous across the great plain when the night should come; but none of that was visible.

The pinkish-brown plain merged everywhere into



the pinkish-yellow sky: it was impossible to believe that there were lands beyond the limits of sight, where grass grew and ducks swam stoutly upon reedy ponds.

Behind the tail of the train we could see the horizon on the other side; and at midday there was nothing to distinguish east from west; but across this dry world to the north the twin bars of shining metal along which the train had come merged in the distance into a single bar of steel, like the back of the blade of a sword, the English sword laid upon this land.

Mary and I stood looking back along the blade, a blade which we were putting down, we both hoped, for ever.

I said something like "The loneliness of it and the hatred. See, the rails are so hot you can't touch them. Our little trainful of people is carried along the burning metals . . . then the rails lie still, expanding in the sun. . . . Hours later, perhaps, another train comes back along these same rails, but nobody thinks of the trains which have gone before or which will come after; and soon enough no more trains will come, and the rails will burn and rust and twist in the sun."

Then we turned to walk the five yards to our

compartment and we saw that the train was gone.

Almost a quarter of a mile away the little square back of the guard's van was jolting slowly, indifferently, to the south.

Mary said, “Oh, God!” And I probably said—for it is the sort of thing one does say in an emergency—“The train's gone.”

I took off my topee and waved it. . . . The gesture was one of agonised despair, but it must have been superbly inappropriate, waving a hat to a parting train . . . as a boy will to his “best girl” at—at Blackpool.

“There'll be another train in an hour or two,” I said. “Damn that careless fool of a guard: it's his business to shepherd his flock in, isn't it? The guards are all English, too. Bearer will find us missing at the next stop and will take charge of our luggage; and I've got plenty of money in my pocket-book, thank God, and our tickets too.”

Mary said, “I don't think there'll be another train that way to-day. . . . We can't sit here. . . . We should die of sunstroke.”

Mary had, indeed, not taken her terai to the dining-car, but was holding a thin, green-lined parasol above her head, and for hat was wearing a pretty yellow mesh creation, intended hopefully by

"A"

INDIAN

its creator for Ascot or Auteuil, Longchamps or Wimbledon.

What a load of unperceived responsibilities the latter carries. Small wonder he is mad.

Mary tells me that all I found to answer was, "You look very smart, my dear."

"Don't be a fool," she said. "What can we do? . . . We must *do* something."

"No," I said. "Nothing whatever, nothing at all."

At this stage Mary quite definitely decided to die. She said nothing. She did nothing. She simply decided that she would die. She did not convey her decision to me by gesture or by word; but I was none the less aware of her decision and I was very, very frightened. I believe it is an accepted phenomenon that certain African natives can die when they want to. . . . I see no good reason why an English woman should be behindhand in determination.

Everywhere around us was death, and the sun was death overhead.

Then we perceived that the square of the guard's van was getting larger.

Neither of us spoke. When the train had come right back to where we stood the guard got down

and said quite civilly, “I didn’t see no one on the line, sir. Lucky someone saw you and pulled the cord. You ought to be more careful, sir, in future.”

Together, silent and trembling, we climbed back into our sleeper. As I shut the door I caught sight of bearer’s anxious little face peering out of the next compartment, but the rest of the train was asleep after its lunch. It did not matter to anyone that the train had started and stopped again and then moved backwards for a quarter of a mile along a single track. Not a head was pushed out of a window. In India one doesn’t let down one’s mosquito window for nothing. When one is travelling in India, too, one has a lot of sleep to make up.

Mary lay down at once. At the next stop bearer came in and made us tea on a spirit stove perched on the lid of the basin in our lavatory, and then sat patiently in our lavatory when he had washed up the cups for three and a half hours till we stopped for dinner.

In the dark night, walking again beside the dim train, I thought of the horrors of being left behind, unable perhaps even to stop the next train, for, lightless, how should one be perceived? We both shivered, I think, in the increasing heat. . . .

Such things must not be thought of. . . . We both knew that the next afternoon we should be here, in Bombay.

After dinner Mary went to bed and, strangely enough, slept; but after midnight she would sleep no more. She said that she had seen a face at the mosquito netting of the window. It was unthinkable that we should close the glass window also; and the mosquito wire was, she said, an insufficient protection; so we sat up and talked and drank six silly little bottles of soda-water, till at dawn we were like a pair of nervous captive balloons jerking in the wind.

During the night I thought of the face she had seen or imagined at our window, the face of any Indian, of every Indian, the face of India, looking in at a pregnant white woman, with a race hatred more potent than any individual spite. . . . No wonder we were running away.

A woman must be strangely insensitive who will have her baby born in India, surrounded by so much malevolence and loathing, to be born a child of the barbarian, foreign, ruling caste.

In two days' time we shall be on the high seas, in less than a month we shall be in Naples. We shall stay at the Santa Lucia, I suppose. . . . We shall

not be able to afford Bertolini's or Parker's; but the Santa Lucia is a charming hotel. Naples again, with Capri a dim sphinx across the bay.

I don't like Naples much, but it is Europe, and there will be time to think about India; but having thought, shall I be any the wiser?

It will be cold when we get through the Canal. The Mediterranean at the end of January—ugh! . . . But we are wise already. . . . We have escaped. . . . Does the rest matter?



PART NINE

“B”

*THE OPEN SEA*





11th January, 1928. (From the diary of Mary Charles.)

I haven't written in my diary for days, not since the day after we sailed. Life on board ship is just a long doze, broken by meals. I find it very difficult to muster enough energy even to read a book.

There is something mesmeric about that vast shining space stretching for miles all round, and about the steady throb of the ship's screw as she beats her way over it.

But to-day something has happened which has touched me deeply. . . .

We saw, when we were coming on board in Bombay, a stretcher being carried up the gangway, but nobody ever said anything to us about an invalid, and in the business of settling down, I suppose, we did not think to make any enquiries.

Then the day before yesterday a cabin window on the promenade deck was open, which had always been shut before; and, walking aft, I saw her propped up at the window of her cabin, the most ghastly living person I have ever seen. She was a skeleton. The skin, like shiny, yellow parchment, was stretched taut over the bones, and from two

sunken holes her eyes shone, dark and exhausted.

The stewardess told me that she was really much too ill to travel; but that she had had a great wish to go to England (she was English), and so, in spite of everyone's advice, she was embarked.

Apparently she was suffering from two or three different tropical diseases, spruh, which is a fearful kind of exaggerated dysentery, and malaria, following black-water fever; but the real danger was her heart, which, after all that suffering, had become very weak.

The heat, which has been intense, must have tried her very much. The stewardess told me yesterday that it was not expected that she would reach Naples; and added that, being so ill, she ought to have stayed behind in Bombay.

Perhaps the stewardess felt, as people whose business is on the sea so often feel, that to carry a dying person might bring bad luck to the ship; but I think I know how the invalid passenger felt, and how she could not have stayed in Bombay with the sea so near and always whispering and urging her to escape.

After I had seen her I could not get her out of my mind, and I thought about her a lot that day and again yesterday; and then yesterday evening

we had a fancy-dress ball.

It was not a particularly noteworthy sort of affair, but everyone romped about gaily and got quite noisy, so I suppose it was a success. This is a charming little ship and the atmosphere is so very friendly; perhaps this is because the ship is so small that there is not room for cliquishness on board, and perhaps, being an Italian ship, the passengers are far more cosmopolitan and not so afraid of each other and of their own dignity as they are in British ships sailing to and from India.

Besides, the little bar on board is always full of women as well as men. I don't think people drink much, but quantities of potato-chips and almonds and little anchovy-fingers and olives, blue and green, are eaten, and as many orangeades and lemonades are drunk as whiskies and gins. The point is that the little bar is the meeting place, which is so natural and right. Why not let women into every bar on every ship? It's so much better for them and for the men too. It's the old question of the continental café *versus* the English public-house, and I'm whole-heartedly for the café. But the English lines trading with India are strangely conservative.

At any rate, the dance went merrily and we forgot

all about the invalid. Why shouldn't we? After all, none of us knew her.

At the dance one chubby lady provoked much comment by appearing in a very brief paper skirt and practically nothing else. I have never seen so much fat flesh exposed by anyone off the stage before. She said she was "Columbine."

This particular lady has already earned for herself a certain notoriety by frequently leading off the less reputable male passengers to her cabin. She is constantly overheard making "dates" with them in a clear, ringing voice in the bar, and the rendezvous is always the same.

Well, anyhow, if she likes amusing herself in that way, there is no earthly reason why she shouldn't, though perhaps a little more discretion would be wiser.

Anyway, she was affording me food for thought. I was just wondering whether she really found her sort of life satisfying (I believe she is married and quite comfortably off), or whether, in a few years' time, when she has no longer any pretensions to looks, she will take to drink or to drugs or turn into a petulant, hysterical invalid, when Mrs. T—— came up and told me that the invalid lady was dying and that she could not last out the night.

I hoped that the sound of the band did not reach her ears; but she was far away aft and I do not think it can have. I hoped that all that she heard was the throb of the screw and the swish of the sea as the ship cut her way through it. Maybe she heard nothing of this world then, and that is best of all.

To-day we heard that she was dead. Everyone was silent and depressed, but no one talked about her; after all, no one had known her. She had come and gone like a shadow.

The captain was very late for lunch, but it was not until afterwards that we knew that while we were lunching he and one or two of the officers had been burying the dead woman.

The ship had slowed down for a moment while we were all below and then, unperceived by any of us, I think, had gone on again at her steady fifteen knots.

Well, I suppose that is as good a way of making an escape as any.

Now that she has gone we all feel lighter.

She knew what it was to be a prisoner in a far country. She was haunted by the awful fear of dying there; and she was determined, just as we ourselves are, to be free of it at all costs.

For that freedom she has paid the price of her life; but was it not worth it?

I think it was, and I am sure she must have thought so too.

Well, she is dead; but we are alive, and, because we are alive, we must hope for ourselves.

Meanwhile our little ship pushes on, bearing us away further and further from that grim, tragic, tawdry and pathetic country, India.

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